Liturgy and the Beauty of the Unknown

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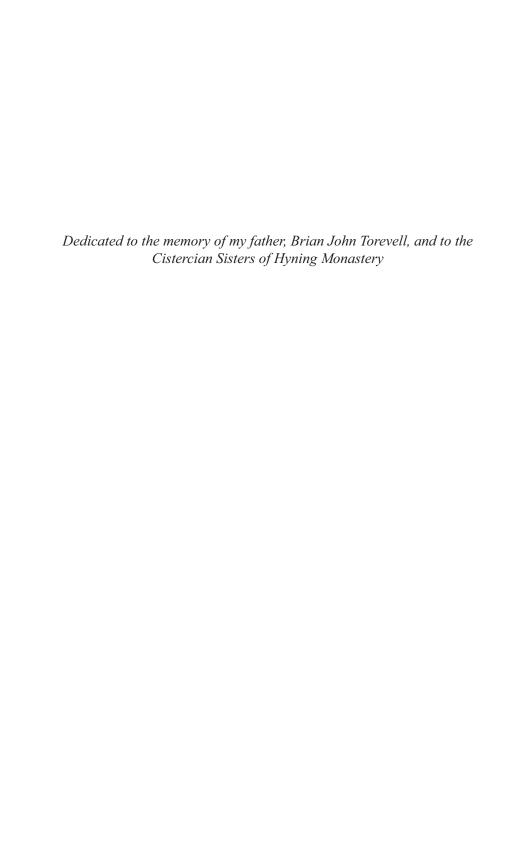
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LITURGY AND THE BEAUTY OF THE UNKNOWN

Contemporary culture is rediscovering the importance of beauty for both social transformation and personal happiness. Theologians have sought, in their varied ways, to demonstrate how God's beauty is associated with notions of truth and goodness. This book breaks new ground by suggesting that liturgy is the means par excellence by which an experience of beauty is communicated. Drawing from both secular and religious understandings, in particular the mystical and apophatic tradition, the book demonstrates how liturgy has the potential to achieve the one ultimately reliable form of beauty because its embodied components are able to reflect the disturbing beauty of the One to whom worship is always offered. Such components rely on understanding the aesthetic dynamics upon which liturgy relies.

This book draws from a broad range of disciplines concerned with understanding beauty and self-transformation and concludes that while secular utopian forms have much to contribute to ethical transformation, they ultimately fail since they lack the Christological and eschatological framework needed, which liturgy alone provides.

Dedicated to the memory of my father, Brian John Torevell, and to the Cistercian Sisters of Hyning Monastery

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Another Place

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Contents

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Introduction

It is precisely characteristic of the God of revelation to reveal Himself. The God of love is 'apophatic' not in a 'withdrawal' to a hidden essence … rather the God of love is apophatic in that He 'brings the one filled by Him to adoring silence'.

(Gawronski 1995: 58)

The purpose of this book is to offer an approach to Christian liturgy for the twenty-first century which takes seriously and highlights its mystical, symbolic and aesthetic constituents. Although largely rooted in my hopes for the future of Roman Catholic liturgy, I trust my position will have important ecumenical and indeed, interfaith implications for the practice of worship. Unlike those who argue that relevance and adaptation to cultural norms are integral to any reinvigoration of liturgy at the present time, the position taken here centres on an aesthetic understanding of worship which releases a transformative movement of the self through liturgical form, allowing an endless and unsatiated encounter with the Unknown. I contend that it is the task of the liturgical Church to offer the embodied presence of the resurrected Christ to the world, a body once disfigured but restored to glory, a body of beauty. Such a task demands an imaginative performance of ritual which encourages worshippers to see the self and the world in a new Christological way, entailing the enactment of a drama of beauty which enthrals and attracts. What is required, I argue, is a capacity to symbolise and image the shape of Christ's life through worship, in the hope that an anagogical movement towards an unlimited horizon of the divine will take place. I seek to show that Christian ritual performances must proceed from a symbolic reappropriation of the Christian narrative, which reflects a theology of beauty and a spirituality rooted in apophaticism.

Antony Gormley's sculpture *Another Place* illustrates my argument by offering a visible form to illuminate this liturgical hope and endeavour. It embeds 100 cast iron human figures, naked and life-size, into the sand along the Crosby coast on Merseyside in the North West of England. They stand looking out towards the horizon, a mysterious unknown. Secured in three-metre-deep foundation piles and stretching one kilometre into the Irish sea, they enjoy the open sky as their background. The figures are heavy, resolute, and yet appear light and movable, the enduring body the central focus within the created space. There is a determination and resoluteness about each figure. The sculptor writes, 'In this work human life is tested against planetary time. This sculpture exposes to light and time the nakedness of a particular body, no hero, no ideal, just the industrially reproduced body of a middle-aged man trying to remain standing and trying to breathe, facing an horizon busy with ships, moving materials and manufactured things around the planet.' Children play around them and touch their bodies. Others spray graffiti on their limbs. Some feel them sensually, as objects of beauty; others gaze out, along with the figures, into the unknown. In November 2006, they were to be dug out and released from the landscape to find a new space in New York but a campaign to make them permanent,

next to the regenerative activity surrounding their present location, questioned this move; people wanted them to stay. Later, on hearing about a campaign to get them removed, Gormley commented that *Another Place* can go anywhere. 'I can imagine installing it all round an island in the Outer Hebrides and it would work very well. The piece is all about unknown futures and wishing for them in a variety of ways, hoping that good things will come across the horizon' (*Guardian*, 21 October, 2006: 40). I hope Gormley's sculpture will serve as an analogous expression for the theological and liturgical arguments I put forward in this book, exhibiting as they do a series of human shapes looking out into an unknown horizon, 'another place', mysterious and unknown; a site which is endlessly beckoning and enthralling.

I centre my proposals and concerns around three foundational and interlocking themes, which serve to support my ongoing contentions and conclusions. These are: first, the implications of the *mystical tradition* and in particular, its apophatic strand, as a solid basis for understanding an important dimension and trajectory of liturgy; second, the implications of the concept of *imago Dei* and its association with the *doctrine of deification* in offering a fundamental aim of liturgy and third, the role of *the material and aesthetics* in any substantive theory and practice of liturgy.

The connecting thread throughout the book will be the notions of 'movement' and transformation. By this I imply that any understanding of worship is best served by locating it within the trajectory of divine and human desire, a movement which begins with the 'ecstatic' procession of God's love, made visible in the incarnate Word, encouraging a return movement towards that which is endlessly beautiful. I emphasize that liturgy has the task of repositioning the world and the self in relation to its beatific performance, a vision which lifts participants away from seeing life as a mere lump of existence and which resituates them on a trajectory of desire towards the infinitely unknowable and beautiful. As Underhill underlines in her 1936 classic on liturgy, 'Christian worship is … a response in which (man) moves out towards Reality, sheds self-occupation, and the finds the true basis of his life' (1936: 339). As a consequence of the position taken, the dialectical relationship between the beauty and sacramentality of the world and the ultimate eschatological vision will be kept to the forefront of my argument, as will the space liturgy inhabits between the visible and invisible, the known and the unknown, that boundary line where 'another place' is felt and experienced.

An echo of my notion of the importance of liturgical movement and orientation is seen in Pope Benedict XVI's critique of Roman Catholic worship after the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. 'Another place' for the present Pontiff consists in recognizing that worship 'reaches beyond everyday life' and gives us 'a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from the divine world into ours' (Ratzinger 2000: 21). Like the hopeful figures in Gormley's sculpture who, bathed in light, look out into the horizon, worship too 'has the character of anticipation. It lays hold in advance of a more perfect life and, in so doing, gives our present life its proper measure. A life without anticipation, a life no longer open to heaven, would be empty, a leaden life' (Ratzinger 2000: 21). This is why Pope Benedict XVI is critical of the priest facing the people in present-day Eucharistic celebrations. The ancient Christian tradition was for both priest and people to face the East, the symbol of the rising sun. But now, unlike Judaism and

Islam, who acknowledge the importance of facing towards their respective sites of revelation, more abstract Western Christian thinking has eliminated this important orientation and looking. If we are to worship the God who both embraces the cosmos and is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves (Ratzinger 2000: 75) – a theme related strongly to this dynamic which I discuss at length in Chapter 2 – then, 'we should express in Christian prayer our turning to the God who has revealed himself to us' (Ratzinger 2000: 75–6).

As I argue consistently throughout the book, liturgy must maintain an incarnational and symbolic model, while at the same time allowing for a vital sense of connecting to and reaching beyond that which is concrete and finite. The movement is Janus-faced – from the infinite to the finite and from the finite to the infinite. As Pope Benedict XVI writes,

> Just as God assumed a body and entered the time and space of this world, so it is appropriate to prayer – at least to communal liturgical prayer – that our speaking should be 'incarnational', that it should be Christological, tuned through the incarnate Word to the triune God. The cosmic symbol of the rising sun expresses the universality of God above all particular places and yet maintains the concreteness of divine revelation. (Ratzinger 2000: 76)

But what matters, as in Gormley's sculpture, is that we look 'together at the Lord. It is not now a question of dialogue but of common worship, of setting off toward the One who is to come. What corresponds with the reality of what is happening is not the closed circle but the common movement forward, expressed in a common direction for prayer' (Ratzinger 2000: 81). Looking at the priest has no importance – looking towards 'another place' does (2000: 81).

The Movement towards the Unknown – Using and Going beyond the Material and Created Order

Throughout this book I shall argue that liturgy is best understood within the apophatic tradition of Christian spirituality, a tradition which has emphasized how the overwhelming impact of God's love brings one most naturally to adoration, often through the experience of silence. I trace, through an extended examination of Denys the Areopagite in Chapter 1, how this foundation of liturgy needs to be reclaimed in the twenty-first century and how the thrust of this tradition in Christian mysticism is rooted in the paradox of the Word made Flesh and by means of the immanence of the transcendent God, the Being who is ontologically independent from finite reality, but who becomes revealed in flesh and blood. Liturgy always reminds worshippers that He who has transformed creation through His embodied kenotic love, enables a movement to begin back from the material to the immaterial, from the known to the unknown, from the seen to the unseen, from the created to the Uncreated. As the Orthodox liturgist Alexander Schmemann (2003) suggests in his discussions of Byzantine worship, this is a essentially a movement of mystery, rising from the material to the spiritual and the sensual to the noumenal, but one which takes the material and sensual as being immensely important to that ascent. I shall argue that a recapturing of this dynamic is liturgy's challenge for the future.

I will emphasize how the cataphatic always works in association with the apophatic as part of their procedural natures. I will highlight how the material and fleshy, especially in their symbolic and imaged forms, are not only given a special status, but become the redemptive touchstones through which a movement beyond the created order towards a fuller realization of the mysteries of Truth and Beauty occurs. The known acts as the gateway to the Unknown; the expressible lends credence to the inexpressible; the finite leads to the infinite. As the Orthodox theologian Lossky comments, 'The existence of an apophatic attitude – of a going beyond every thing that has a connection with created finitude – is implied in the paradox of the Christian revelation: the transcendent God becomes immanent in the world, but in the very immanence of His economy, which leads to the incarnation and death on the cross, He reveals Himself as transcendent, as ontologically independent of all created being' (1975: 14–15).

I argue that it is through the liturgical use of the cataphatic – its symbolic and aesthetic materiality, poetic discourse and ritualized silence of space, gesture and movement – that God becomes concealed and disclosed. Any such concealment and disclosure echo the interplay of the apophatic and cataphatic dimensions of worship, its dual, distinctive dynamic. I therefore refer to those Christian theologians who, rooted in the apophatic tradition, realize the importance of this and who, by implication, acknowledge how any liturgical movement begins with the material and the sensual in the hope of proceeding towards the ineffable and unknown. The dynamic of the material has the propensity to release a movement beyond itself towards that divine silence, to which, as Hederman says, 'every scrap of revelation, every detail of tradition, points' (2002: 19).

I discuss how this journey to the silent darkness, the 'cloud of unknowing', begins for Christianity with the Word made flesh and how worship assumes the daunting challenge of (paradoxically) enacting and 'articulating' that silence. As Davies and Turner insist, 'negation is never free-standing' (2002: 3). The flesh speaks the silent Word. It is impossible to understand the role of the apophatic until you have understood the role of the cataphatic (2002: 11–34). Sheldrake, in his discussion of Denys, is accurate to describe them as 'two sides of the same coin whereby the cosmic cycle of God's outpouring into creation, and the return of all into the One, demands both an affirmation of the meaningfulness of symbols and, at the same time, a destruction of all symbols for the naked knowledge of unknowing' (1991: 193). In this regard, apophasis carries a considerable theological weight since it 'articulates the human response to a divine communicative presence, and it is burdened as much by an excess of presence as it is by an endemic sense of absence' (Davies 2002: 201). It is also essentially celebratory since it endorses the divine–human communication, witnessed most profoundly in its liturgical expression as the supreme meeting place of presence and absence, silence and Word, yearning and fulfilment. In examining this theme, I consider how the vertical is never separated from the horizontal in worship and how its sacramental materiality is crucial in releasing an anagogic ascent to the divine.

Throughout the book I show how Christian liturgy has at its disposal a range of intensified expressions, including, in particular, its images, symbols and gestures, which allow such an excess of mysterious meaning to unfold. In Chapter 3, in

particular, I emphasize how the dominance given to the visual in the medieval period needs to be reclaimed, since the excess of meaning and presence such social apparatus encourages allows a movement to take place which culminates in a crossing of the boundary of language and materiality, nudging worshippers towards that silence where God is most fully revealed. Such a movement begins through acts of adoration and praise centred initially around the material and concrete, (including its linguistic forms). And because the apophatic emphasizes the 'limitless criticism' of language to express the divine, it simultaneously endorses silence as the most appropriate response when language inevitably fails, safeguarding the mystery of the Trinity, which can never be fully expressed *within* the rite. The rite, as a consequence, always points to something beyond itself, to something outside its limits: 'Successful enactments of rite involve a realisation that something has been effected that speaks from beyond the limit of the rite' comments Flanagan (1991: 312), and as a result, 'The apophatic tradition suits best liturgical actions since they operate well under conditions that manifest Godlike qualities in performance signifying what is beyond conceptual understanding' (1991: 311).

The apophatic tradition within the history of Christian spirituality has always by inference given status to the 'epistemological' desire of the liturgical self. To encounter and to 'know' God in any substantial manner is only ever possible through acts of love, adoration and praise. Language and rite begin the anagogical movement as they signify that something else *beyond the rite* is responsible for its beauty and life. *Homo adorans* is the primary means of realizing this truth, as worshipping selves of praise respond to the inexpressible love of the Father. *Apotheosis*, due to its emphasis on limitless horizons, always reminds us that our frustrated and committed endeavours of language – even the ritualized language of the body – never have the last word. For in liturgy, theological concepts collapse into prayerful contemplation and ecclesial dogmas become acted out with endless meaning, as our holistic self is engaged and awakened to something beyond its usual place, while in the context of 'the Word made strange' (Milbank 1997), and through the 'language' of the reverential body, the excess of divine love makes its mysterious, overpowering impact on the space worshippers inhabit. As a consequence, the self begins to expand by its encounter with something much greater than itself through the symbolism and materialism it encounters, which in turn beckons forward an ecstatic movement, a mystical stepping outside the limited or empirical self. As Lossky notes, such a movement 'is a tendency towards an ever-greater plenitude, in which knowledge is transformed into ignorance, the theology of concepts into contemplation, dogmas into experience of ineffable mysteries. It is, moreover, an existential theology involving man's entire being, which sets him upon the way of union, which obliges him to be changed …' (quoted in R. Williams 2000: 10).

I discuss how this ongoing, ceaseless liturgical movement of ascent entails a metamorphosis of the self through its staged encounter with the divine. In Chapter 2, for example, I demonstrate how some theologians in the Christian tradition have emphasized this as a double movement – outer and inner – entailing an experience of *absolute transcendence and personal intimacy*. Once the self is remembered as *imago Dei*, a tendency towards adoration and thanksgiving begins to emerge. Any such movement, I suggest, is nothing less than a never-ending process of deification, which leads to a subjugation of hubris and the narcissistic self (Lasch 1991) in favour

of an expansion of the divine self. I argue that this change teaches worshippers that there is 'another place', ontologically and imaginatively, to which we belong and in which we will find our ultimate happiness; indeed, where our identity is revealed and enjoyed. I contend that this movement back to the beatific vision is the ritual dynamic worship has the task of perfecting and that to embody in reverential action what our nature desires and to know who we are by *experiencing* our devotional and thanksgiving selves, is to learn, through the submissive actions of the worshipping body, our creaturely dependence on the God of our deepest being and desires. This liturgical movement of *ekstasis* in relation to beauty is what this book attempts to plot and capture. It emphasizes God's incomprehensibility and at the same time, divine and human *kenosis* (self-emptying), and it traces how the Christian life becomes vibrant when worshippers let go of conceptual thinking and step into a new realm of unknowing and *kenosis* towards a fuller Trinitarian life. This is nothing less than a transformation through deification.

If the Church is to release this movement towards the unknowable God of Love and come anywhere close to a reflection and performance of the depth and mystery of divine revelation, then its liturgy must become a corresponding icon of that experience. The life-giving narrative which defies discursive explanation has to find a performance worthy of its task, a daunting endeavour which requires an imaginative and *affective performance* of the events of salvation. This 'feeling for' the narrative of redemption calls for an aesthetically informed re-enactment, one which releases the ability of participants to share in the life of the divine, acted out and imaged before them. It calls for an identification with, and learning from, the sacred images which surround ritual performance.

Seeing and Experiencing 'Another Place'

But liturgists are mistaken if they assume that the finite (even within ritual forms) can ever come close to an expression of the infinite. The liturgical soul's ascent is an endless, dramatic journey into difference, a constant and stumbling traversing of the distance towards mystery. However, if the gift of the analogous being is received and appreciated, then that distance can become a movement of ascent which allows an experience of God's bountiful excessiveness, an anagogic uplifting that moves the self by means of the Spirit towards the divine; but one which never exhausts or outranks the Infinite. Such a movement does not entail alienation for it is a distance of love, and any stepping towards the Absolute, through finite intervals, is always a moving towards the proximate, towards the One who pervades all things and who is at the centre of the self; the divine is always closer than we are to ourselves and more distant than our thoughts can ever imagine (Hart 2003: 194). My discussion of this theme takes place in Chapter 2.

Nevertheless, as I have hinted at earlier, worship never relegates the divine as somehow *totally* outside the cult. The world experienced in liturgy is always co-extensive with the world longed for and sought; indeed, the borderland between two worlds is precisely the space liturgy inhabits. I take seriously Loughlin's suggestion in his examination of theology, desire and film, that the ritual space of worship, like cinema, is a place where dreams are enacted; the church always offers 'inside places

where images of an outside other than that from which the viewers have come are shown. When the lights go down, one can see other imagined worlds, other ways of being human' (2004: 53). The Church is akin to Plato's cave where she 'marshals its inhabitants for the participative viewing of images, scenes of dispossessive charity and fellowship' (2004: 54). But what becomes 'deconstructive irony in Plato' becomes in the Church something to be embraced positively, since 'the knowledge of the exterior can be gained only inside the enclosure. The dazzling light of the real is to be seen by the firelight' (2004: 54).

A theme I emphasize is that such 'seeing' is never illusion or pretence, but an encounter with a new reality. Like Antony Gormley's sculpture, the viewing of 'another place' only becomes possible through the concrete figures occupying and using material form, space and light. Seeing herself as the Christian cave, the Church offers a distinctive place where 'another place' might be glimpsed. Her images, symbols and ritual practices become the means, (to use Loughlin's evocative phrase), 'for the imagining of a different reality, or rather for imagining reality differently' (2004: 54). This experience is a sacramental one, because unlike Plato's cave, Christianity locates the divine within the sacred space. The Good and the Beautiful become present. The Church's worship, in using the redeemed materiality of the world, allows 'another world' to be imaged and expressed. It becomes a place for a different kind of seeing and being. The location of 'another place', therefore, starts within worship, the life of that other country bursting forth in the ritual space, setting up a desire for a life which is the only 'real' one, made present through sacred performance. I argue, therefore, that any effective liturgy of the future will always encourage participants to move and feel within the cave, in order to recognize what *ultimately* is without.

With reference to this position, the contested site of the viewing of images in the formation of Christian identity offers an important strand in my argument. I discuss how the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century, which focussed on the use of imaging the divine, became a test case for acknowledging what the apophatic tradition had always maintained – that the material is the vehicle by which the unknown and invisible becomes revealed and disclosed, a belief which has the Incarnation as its witness and defence. The visible allows access to the invisible, the seen a window onto the unseen, the known a trajectory towards the unknown, the light captured in images an avenue pointing towards the 'luminous darkness' of which Gregory of Nyssa speaks (quoted in Daniélou 1962: 29). I agree with Sheldrake who reminds us that, 'The world and human experience is where the encounter with God must begin ... The two-fold movement of divine manifestation to us and our arduous return to God is recognised in what Panikkar calls "true iconolatry"' (1991: 198). Such 'iconolatry' is essential and the liturgy of the twenty-first century must realize this.

Theology of Beauty

Acknowledging the displacement and repression of beauty in Western culture (von Balthasar 1989; Jantzen 2004).[1] I argue in Chapter 4 for the importance of a

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1   This displacement of beauty due to the preoccupation with death within the Western symbolic was to have been traced in a multi-volume work by Jantzen. Unfortunately, only

theological aesthetics of worship in releasing an endless and inexhaustible traversing to 'another place'. Not only does such a model assist in appreciating the irreducible 'givenness' of the beauty of the world and its claims upon our wonder and surprise, it also reinforces the view that any Cartesian-like certitude or Kantian reason are unable to respond to the world of gratuity and excess. Entrusting ourselves to what is more than and uncontrollable by ourselves, beauty must become a central feature of worship. The unfathomable depths of beauty which beckon worshippers to ever greater meaning in their lives, draw them into radically new ways of being and living in the world (Garcia-Rivera 2003). Frequently I refer to von Balthasar, who has argued that beauty is the last thing the thinking intellect dares to approach (1989: 18), since it dances around the double constellation of truth and beauty, but the modern world has destroyed the once privileged place beauty held and consequently now, the good also loses its attractiveness. I share his alarming thought that the results are potentially catastrophic: 'Man stands before the good and asks himself why it must be done and not rather its alternative, evil. For this, too, is a possibility, and even the more exciting one: Why not investigate Satan's depths?' (1989: 19). But there are further consequences – once beauty has lost its hold, Being itself is under threat. The sure light named by Aquinas is in danger of being snuffed out and the mystery of Being itself is consequently no longer able to express itself.

On the other hand, argues von Balthasar, 'When it is achieved, Christian form is the most beautiful thing that may be found in the human realm' (1989: 28). We see this in the saints' lives but 'in our time our eyes (like those of Rilke's "Panther" as he paces his cage) seem to be "so tired from endlessly counting the bars" that even these most sublime figures of human existence can hardly snatch us from our lethargy' (1989: 28–9). The Christian life entails living according to values glimpsed in 'another place', an experience which calls forth a disciplined, contemplative and prayerful response. Contemplatives might become 'fools' and many 'will attempt to explain their state in terms of psychological or even physiological laws (Acts 2: 13)', but they 'know what they have seen, and care not one farthing what people may say' (von Balthasar 1989: 33); their attitude towards beauty calls forth a pneumatic existence which entails a worshipping self, often spent in 'spiritual psalms, hymns, odes, singing through grace to God in your hearts (Col 3.16)' (1989: 33). Von Balthasar claims that on beholding the form we are enraptured by our contemplation and then recognize form as the splendour and glory of Being. Drawn in by its depths, we are transported to them. But the horizontal is always indispensable: 'so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the horizontal from behind us in order to plunge (vertically) in to the depths' (1989: 119). Denys and St John of the Cross – the two theologians who relied most consistently on the apophatic method – knew this and never divorced the apophatic from the cataphatic: 'They could exalt the vertical to such a degree only because they never let go of the horizontal' (1989: 125).

I also claim that there is a relation between the form of revelation and the form of beauty. And this is why I demonstrate the importance of the aesthetic constituent

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Volume 1, *Foundations of Violence* (2004) was completed, due to the author's untimely death in 2005.

of liturgy and its potential to create this form. Liturgists, in their desire to represent the awesome beauty of the One made flesh – the face of beauty – must take the aesthetic nature of worship seriously. In Chapter 4, I discuss what such an emphasis on the iconic beautiful face of Christ might entail. I also contend that liturgical representations of beauty must find an affective mode of communication, if worship is to be transformative. The impact of the liturgy becomes, therefore, dependent upon creative modes of delivery and receptivity. In company with Cottingham (2005), I claim that a religious response to the salvific story operates very differently within changed modes of delivery. For example, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* is different to a discussion of the story of redemption in a philosophy seminar. Modes of receptivity vary considerably depending on the type of delivery used; the way we perceive reality will depend upon the mode in which we receive it. Expressive 'showings' of liturgy reflect this and determine the way we perceive the world. I argue that the liturgy offers such a way of 'seeing' the world and how its affective method of communication is crucial. Thus, the use of images, symbols and signs – the imaginative, aesthetic and expressive vehicles of 'imaging' the divine – become crucial for the 'felt' experience of the invisible world liturgy offers. Once worship starts to communicate such an affective response, worshippers learn to feel the story of salvation and to perceive the world and self in new ways. Liturgical worship shares with all ritual action this character of a work of art, as ritual participants become transported to a different world through the use of symbolic materiality (Underhill 1936: 111).

Image and Mystery

In discussing the task of liturgy to encourage a movement into divine mystery in relation to and then beyond the material, I challenge those Protestant reformers who failed to recognize the disclosure of beauty and mystery rooted in the created order and humanity's selfhood. The mystery which the reformers attempted to preserve through their radical insistence on God's sovereignty collapsed into a dismissive philosophy of negation, where all signs of God's beauty in the natural world were banished, or at least scrutinized for absolute proof. Blond has reminded us that Luther's position consists in faith fleeing 'from the objectivity of cognition' and that once methodological negation becomes the only path to a non-idolatrous understanding of God, 'the original intuition of Luther, the attempt to preserve God's mystery, will be lost, as this mystery is not allowed to show itself except in denials that human beings can approach it' (1998: 289). I show how Luther's attempt to preserve God's mystery ends in the loss of mystery itself, since no disclosures are allowed. Such an interiorization of faith is not based on a concept of *imago Dei* but primarily on a scrutiny of the heart, coupled with the denuding of the external world of any signs of God's presence.

To extend this discussion about materiality and the nature of the divine self begun in earlier chapters, I demonstrate in Chapter 5, the relationship between liturgy, mystery, world and self, by referring to those figures, both East and West, whose work points to the importance of this dynamic, in particular, Maximus the

Confessor and, more recently, Rahner and Evdokimov. The historical relationship which has existed between Christian mysticism and its liturgical (and biblical) roots is recalled. Drawing from Bouyer's work (1990), I argue that it is impossible to understand the development of worship without seeing its connection to mystery. Pre-Christian pagan rites were only made sense of by those who had been initiated into the mysterious secrets of the rite, those with privileged access to a world that had no meaning without an induction into what those 'mysteries' could signify and disclose. Rites were not revelatory performances for everyone nor easy *entrés* into the truth. The Greek word *mystikos* means things hidden, concealed behind closed doors. Such hidden things were only recognized by the initiated and then only subtly and prayerfully, through gradual absorption over time by means of its manifestations of beauty and goodness. As I demonstrate in Chapter 1, Denys goes as far as to suggest that the revealed things of God must be *kept* from the uninitiated. One of the reasons for using symbols in the liturgy and the Bible is that those with initiatory powers and perceptions may be raised to a new realm of spiritual knowledge and understanding.

I trace how it is impossible to understand mysticism without appreciating its liturgical, (especially Eucharistic) and biblical heritage. By the fourth century the word 'mystery' refers explicitly to Christian rites. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, calls the Eucharist a 'mystical action', while Gregory of Nazianzus refers to the altar as 'a mystical table' (quoted in Bouyer 1990: 162). Sacraments were mystical events brought about by the use of the symbolic. The baptized, according to Gregory of Nyssa, are those regenerated by a 'mystical economy', while baptism, according to Eusebius, is a 'mystical bath' (quoted in Bouyer 1990: 178). The later use of the iconostasis in the churches of the Middle Ages was aimed precisely at expressing this mystery of the celebration, its deepest meaning, 'the presence of Christ and of his Mystery *in* His Mystery, with us, indeed in us' (Bouyer 1990: 163).

In relation to this dynamic my argument is also concerned with recentring the doctrine of divinization secured through ritual action, a theme largely forgotten in the West. Bouyer's notion that 'The catecheses of the fourth century all start from the Pauline idea that the mystery of Christ must have its final fulfilment in ourselves, and that it is by way of the sacraments that it is extended to us' (1990: 164), supports my contention. Liturgical rites are mysteries in the sense that the Scriptures are mysteries: they contain within them the mysterious life-giving truth of Christ. As the process of deification unfolds through ritual, participants become the adopted sons and daughters of the Father, even to the point of becoming other 'Christs'. As Cyril of Jerusalem comments on the anointing with oil, 'Having become, then, partakers of Christ, you yourselves can be called Christs, anointed ones, and it is of you that God has said, "Touch not my Christs" … and everything in you has become in the image of this Christ of whom you are the image' (1990: 165). The rites of the pagan mysteries became replaced by the gift of Christ's love and God's grace, the means of attaining a new divine life reminiscent of existence before the Fall. As Gregory of Nazianzus poetically puts it in one of his sermons when describing baptism, 'Jesus, coming up from the waters, has brought back with him the fallen world, and he sees the skies open which Adam has closed, for himself and his descendents, as the flaming sword had closed paradise' (quoted in Bouyer 1990: 168).

The transformation secured through baptism is often described as a raising up to a new identity and the saving of the divine image. For Gregory of Nazianzus this is no less than becoming God's sons and daughters, an intimate part of the Trinitarian relationship. He writes to his brother Caesarius,

> I must be buried with Christ, rise again with him and inherit heaven with him, become God's son, become God! That is for us the great mystery. That is what it means to us that God became incarnate, a poor man, for us. He came to raise up the flesh, to save his own image, to put men together again. (Quoted in Bouyer 1990: 168)

This 'putting together again' for Leo the Great entails recognizing our dignity, our likeness to the divine nature. The life worth living is one which in its *transitus* from the earthly realm to the kingdom, secured by ritual absorption into the paschal mystery of Christ, allows a raising up and return. Like Moses and his followers the baptized are given a new life in a new land. Denys's *Mystical Theology* was deeply influenced by both Gregory of Nyssa and St Nazianzus in their use of the Exodus analogy and such a parallel was enriched not only by its Jewish sources and by St Paul himself, but also by the influential *Homilies on Exodus* by Origen.

Schmemann argues that by the end of the fourth century 'The cult became more and more a sacred action in itself, a mystery performed for the sanctification of those participating (2003: 127). It 'gradually became set in a new "framework" and became overgrown with ritual actions, designed to stress its "mysteriological" essence' (2003: 127). Later 'this mysteriological liturgical piety expressed itself mainly in the idea of consecration or initiation …' (2003: 129). Thus, 'The idea of consecration or initiation is connected in the most profound way with the concept of mystery. One is initiated into the mystery – and the mystic, as one who is initiated … is set over against the uninitiated' (2003: 129). The experience, therefore, of an invisible, objective world, 'another place', was only secured by an initiated, ontological entry into the liturgy allied to an understanding of the Word. Christian rites carried forward this emphasis on mystery offered to those initiated into the cult and, through this means, participants not only caught a glimpse of a new reality, but also became transformed into other Christs. I show how this is what the practice of Christianity was *and is*: to be offered and receive revelatory disclosures of the things of God which lay hidden but accessible to the initiated by means of established rites –and to be ontologically transformed by them.

In Chapter 5, by marshalling, in particular, Rahner's theology and key Orthodox liturgical voices, I extend this theme of the divine mystery at the heart of human selfhood and the world.[2] I show how, as a Jesuit Roman Catholic theologian, deeply influenced by the Ignatian spirit, Rahner saw the spiritual life as an encounter with

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2   Vatican Council II's document, *Gaudium et Spes*, repositioned notions of grace within the realm of human history. This pastoral text, in keeping with the overall aim of the Council, emphasized the presence of the Spirit outside the Judaeo-Christian realm, a presence pervading the whole of human life. For Rahner, earlier understandings of nature and grace became little more than externally imposed operations of sacramentalism, what he termed 'extrinicism'. The start of the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World states: 'Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo' in the hearts of Christians (Flannery 1992: 903). The

the mystery of the self and the world. I discuss his view that any such mystery never manifests itself at a distance but in nearness. But that does not mean it is no longer a mystery: 'On the contrary, the mystery is there and most truly itself, radically nameless, indefinable and inviolable. Grace is therefore the grace of the *nearness* of the abiding *presence*; it makes God … incomprehensible' (Rahner 1966: 56). While we think 'that comprehension is greater than being overwhelmed by light inaccessible, which shows itself as inaccessible in the very moment of giving itself; we have understood nothing of the mystery and of the true nature of grace and glory' (1966: 56).

The liturgical challenge is to accept this love, adore the mystery and achieve blessing through an anogogical ascent. Not to, is to be tempted to fall into adoring our own idolatrous image of God, an image made according to our own measure. The true image is witnessed through a journey of interiority. As Gregory of Nyssa reminds us: 'Beatitude consists not in knowing something about God but in having Him within us' (quoted in Lossky 1975: 38). Such an experience is described as darkness. For Rahner, true religion is always the facing up to mystery and the basis of religion adoration and love, the 'gathering up of all things in love within its own unity' (1971: 241). Here the apophatic situates itself within the worshipping self, for it is in the abandonment to the mystery of human living that we come to realize the mystery which is beyond all things and to which our most natural response is awe and adoration.

Besides drawing from important theologians and liturgists, I also bear in mind how any liturgical hopes for the future, especially those involving aesthetics, must take due regard of gender. The work of Grace Jantzen is of importance here and reminds readers about the excessive privileging of 'male' reason and cognition and the detrimental effect this has had on the development of aesthetics within the Western symbolic. Jantzen is right to insist that,

> What is urgently required is a theology of beauty; a theology not based on the standard formulations of doctrine and practice of the Christendom of modernity but on a divine horizon in which alterities of gender, economic, and ethnicity are allowed to destabilise our comfortable assumptions, and in which the ethical and aesthetic considerations generated by these alterities shape the theology as surely as they are shaped by it. (2002: 428)

The gendering of aesthetics in antiquity and its influence on later Christian thinking has meant that beauty has invariably been exclusively associated with the next world and that this immortal realm was conceptually linked with the male mind and the spirit. The female could never be part of this since she was always associated with birth, the body and death. Von Balthasar never mentions this historical bias and his theology suffers as a result.[3] I hope my vision of the liturgy of the future involving the 'divine horizon' of which Jantzen speaks, recognizes this critique even where

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whole of humanity is linked by its common search for goodness and truth and what it strives for is nothing other than the truth which resides in God.

3   See Beattie's formidable text *New Catholic Feminism* (2005), which attempts to expose the dangerous instabilities of von Balthasar's theology, in particular, 'its violent sexual undercurrents' (2005: 13).

it was not possible to extend discussion of the complex implications involved. Perhaps my view that liturgy inhabits a borderline space between the material and the immaterial might go some way in destabilizing this divide, although I make no claims that this book addresses this important issue in any substantial way. My discussion also notes the contributions from the Continental tradition, where there is generally far more appreciation of how word and image are linked together in discussions of aesthetics and how an emphasis on the former invariably gives undue weight to cognitive models of knowledge and understanding (Jantzen 2002). This is why in Chapter 6, I give considerable space to the work on aesthetics by Dufrenne and point to the remarkable contribution of Cixous in appreciating the power and value of the painter.

In summary then, in Chapter 1 I begin by discussing Denys's apophatic theology of worship as a movement back to the source of life which lies hidden beyond thought, form and being. I show how his emphasis on adoration and homage is situated within a theology of liturgical (and biblical) symbolism which allows an anagogical movement of return to occur. This is accompanied by a sacramental appreciation of all reality and calls for both a penetration and use of the created order and a movement of transcendence beyond it. The movement entails a journey from plurality and difference to unity and simplicity and is an ecstatic one whereby the self steps out of its security and enters the unknown. The progression is an act of clearing where we are encouraged to become like sculptures removing every obstacle to the ascent.

I then move on to discuss the work of St John of Damascus on divine images, the eighth-century theologian deeply influenced by Denys. Both suggest that images and symbols of beauty are indispensable means of conveying the ineffable and encouraging memory of who we are in relation to Christ. Images are divine veils which reveal to the senses things which lie beyond. The Incarnation demands such representations: 'The beauty of images moves me to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God' writes John of Damascus (quoted in Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 1994: 266). They assist in imprinting in the heart's memory what is celebrated in the liturgy.

Next I discuss the medieval Victorines, to demonstrate how in bringing Denys's theology to the West they combined a sacramental insistence with a unique symbolic imagination. Influenced by Denys's definition of symbol as a visible form participating in invisible matter, they succeeded in recapitulating the richness of the apophatic tradition within their monastic–liturgical context at the Abbey of St Denis in Paris. Throughout Chapter 1 I also attempt to show how the anagogical movement within worship begins with the acquisition of the symbolic imagination and an appreciation of the image and the sacramental value of the created order. The liturgical challenge of the future is to demonstrate how such a judicious use of the material within ritual spaces secures a journey towards that which is beyond categorization and expression.

In Chapter 2 I focus on the movement of interiority which liturgy has the task of promoting. In order to begin any liturgical movement of return, it is important to appreciate who we are in relation to the One like whom we might become. Any experience of transcendence is simultaneously an experience of intimacy, of

recognizing our dependence on and likeness to the One we adore. By focussing on the work of four key spiritual writers – St Augustine of Hippo, St Aelred of Rievaulx, William of St Thierry and St Teresa of Avila – I argue that the process of liturgical transformation rests upon a realization that we are made in the image of God. What the four writers have in common is their ability to reactivate the memory of who we are and the implications this recognition has for personal transformational change. Later chapters will suggest how liturgy endorses and further encourages this recognition.

Chapter 3 consolidates some of the findings of Chapter 1 concerning the importance of the image in liturgical settings for any analogical movement. It traces the complex and contested site of the use of images within the Christian tradition, pointing to their importance for securing an affective experience of divine presence and a recognition of 'another place' which worshippers sought within liturgical contexts. It takes an extended example from the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral to demonstrate the way in which the architectural symbolism became a visible means of communicating the multi-layered theology of martyrdom and life after death.

In Chapter 4 I emphasize the movement of desire towards beauty within liturgical spaces. A liturgical theology of beauty is emphasized as being indispensable for any substantial model of worship in the twenty-first century. With reference to the work St Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus and key Orthodox voices on beauty, I argue that liturgy has the task of presenting a form of beauty which is reflective of the form of revelation. Liturgy's challenge is to create an expression of beauty which allows the ineffable to emerge through its signs and symbols, action and stillness, Word and silence, a dynamic analogous to the French film director Robert Bresson's insight about the power of images to disclose a sense of mystery, presence and silence, where each image becomes transformed by the next (Hederman 2002: 60–63).

In Chapter 5 I extend the liturgical movement of mystery by a discussion of Maximus the Confessor and Karl Rahner. Progressing the argument on beauty to include mystery, I first trace Maximus's unique incarnational apophaticism and its bearing on liturgical thinking. I then move on to discuss Rahner's transcendental theology, emphasizing his insistence on how humanity stands before the *mysterium* and its implications for liturgical expression. Rahner's examination of liturgy as an extension of the mysticism of everyday things and of the ultimate depths of life, including its laughter and tears, concludes the chapter.

In Chapter 6 I outline a movement of aesthetics, drawing largely from the work of the French phenomenologist Dufrenne and other key theorists in aesthetics. I argue that his contention that the 'expressed' transfigures the 'represented' has significant implications for liturgy. I outline the importance of the mode of liturgical delivery which entails a multi-layered dynamic of symbols and aesthetic categories which have the potential to 'affect' participants, leading to a transformed way of perceiving the world. Throughout the chapter I argue for the analogous relationship between liturgy and aesthetics, a relationship which has the potential to transform the practice of worship.

Chapter 1

The Movement of Return

In this first chapter I demonstrate how the judicious use of symbolic materiality in liturgy might become a creative and invaluable means of releasing an anagogic ascent to the divine. Indeed, for Denys the Areopagite, St John of Damascus and the Victorines, the liturgical employment of the symbolic and material – what might be more colloquially termed the 'horizontal' – became essential for understanding this movement. Denys offers a brilliant exhortation to interpret the symbols of liturgy and the Scriptures so that worshippers might gradually go beyond those things which have a connection to the created order. St John of Damascus, too, is equally concerned to emphasize the use of the material as he defends the employment of icons and images in Christian homage and worship, suggesting they are divine veils revealing to the senses 'things beyond being'. And the later medieval Victorines, taking their cue from Denys, show how it is inadvisable to let go of the material since its proper use is vital for raising the soul towards God's unknowability and mystery. Although some of their theology might be problematic for an easy transfer into twenty-first century discourse about liturgy, the thrust of their thinking remains applicable and instructive.

Denys the Areopagite

The writings of Denys the Areopagite (also known as Dionysius) emerged in the early sixth century and are a witness to how the Christian life consists in a ceaseless movement back to the God of Beauty, the source of life from which we came. Through the interpretation of liturgical (and Scriptural) symbolism, humanity achieves most effectively this pre-ordained plan of 'lifting up' necessary for a return to the divine. In describing their essential function, Denys points out that their primary purpose is to assist in acknowledging their source and to discern that to which they point and in which they participate. We must move from effects to cause, an endeavour not left to us unaided, since the very Light we seek will assist us on our way as we begin to contemplate the things of God through their symbolic representations and manifestations. The goal is to move and see beyond the veils which surround and hide the mysterious self-giving love of the divine Godhead and to experience something of the Truth, the Light unveiled, as when we move beyond the words used of God, whether affirmative or negative, to discover that which is beyond all language and discursive thinking. Liturgical (and biblical) symbols offer therefore, 'analogies' for the hidden things of divine origin and help in relinquishing our personal notions and images of God as we seek the One, simple God of Truth during our temporary, composite existence on earth. As Denys puts it: 'But as for now, what happens is

this. We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward towards the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one. We leave behind all our own notions of the divine' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 592C). Denys also argues that a movement towards divine union involves, not only a change in the individual from a pre-fallen state towards one re-formed in the image of God, but also a reconstitution of the community into a unified whole. As Denys writes in *The Divine Names*, 'And so all these scriptural utterances celebrate the supreme Deity by describing it as monad or henad, because of its supernatural simplicity and indivisible unity, by which unifying power we are led to unity. We, in the diversity of what we are, are drawn together by it and are led into a godlike oneness, into a unity reflecting God' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 589D). Union with the divine never entails a loss of personal identity but, akin to the experience of St Paul, a transformed self in Christ becomes possible. Denys comments, 'This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power had this inspired word to say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"' (*Divine Names* 4, 1987: 712A).

'Wrapped in the Sacred Veils of Divine Love'

For Denys, such a movement back to God inevitably entails a worshipping self. In *The Divine Names* he comments, 'With our minds made prudent and holy, we offer worship to that which lies hidden beyond thought and beyond being' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 589B). Wrapped in the 'sacred veils' of divine love, liturgical symbolism, in the form of those things derived from the realm of the senses, conveys the various attributes of 'what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 592B). Our natural response to such sacred manifestations is one of reverence and adoration, which reflects a deep desire to return to the source from which we originally came. Our very beings become 'shaped to songs of praise' as we yearn for the divine light, that which is 'wise and beautiful' (*Divine Names* 1, 1987: 589B).

Hymns of thanksgiving become appropriate responses to those gifts which have been poured into the human realm by God's ecstatic love. And since the whole of creation participates in the beauty and goodness of God, humanity's immediate response becomes one of awe and adoration. It is natural to acclaim with thanksgiving our rightful intimacy with all things which emanate from the divine, acknowledging with praise the gift of participation and community. We 'look upward as the light of sacred scripture will allow, and, in reverent awe of what is divine, let us be drawn together toward the divine splendour' (*Divine Names* 1, 1987: 588A). Through seeing the beauty of creation and by interpreting aright the symbolism of liturgy and Scripture we mould ourselves into a community of worshipping beings, a (super)natural response to the beauty veiled but always present, the nameless One who yet 'has the names of everything that is' (*Divine Names* 1, 1987: 596C). At times this entails falling into silence, as an experience of union is triggered. This is the most fitting response to that light which is 'a union far beyond mind, when mind turns away from all things, even from itself, and when it is made one with the

dazzling rays, being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depths of Wisdom' (*Divine Names* 7, 1987: 872B).

Worship responds to and acknowledges that which is beyond being and beyond words – we do homage, aloud and in silence, to that which is inexpressible and which has been poured forth in creation. In order to praise this beauty we must turn 'to all of creation' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 593D). Such praise is proportioned to the beings we are, the flight towards beauty suited to each one, so that we might not be tempted to venture towards 'an impossibly daring sight of God …' (*Divine Names* 1, 1987: 589A). The sacred veils of liturgy and scripture are able to convey the beauty of the divine while we are here on earth (*Divine Names* 1, 1987: 592B). During this life, we use the most appropriate symbols we can to raise us to 'the truth of the mind's vision' (*Divine Names* 1, 1987: 592C).

The cosmos is experienced as part of this divine emanation and manifestation and is beautiful because it flows from the source of beauty. Denys, in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, is astonished that Apollophanes, who is a wise man, does not worship the One who is the cause of everything, the One beyond description. But those who do contemplate the divine are able to give absolute attention to 'that conceptual and fragrant beauty' (Pseudo-Dionysius *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 4, 1987: 473B). If they practise the virtues called for by their initiation they will be able to behold those sacred things of the Church disguised in its rites and conveyed by the Scriptures. For example, in the rite of the ointment they will be transformed into images of that divine fragrance and 'Imitating God, as they do, they can tell the difference between real beauty and real evil' (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 4, 1987: 476A).

The Liturgical Act in Denys: Praising the Silent Word

Von Balthasar's comments on Denys's theology of procession and return are helpful. He suggests that Denys's understanding of worship centres around a marvelling about 'the beauty which appears in every manifestation of the unmanifest, and which is therefore the sacredness of everything apparently profane. Everything lies in the circular movement between procession and return, the cataphatic and the apophatic, nothing can find fulfilment except by entering into this movement' (von Balthasar 1995: 166). Such a movement is dependent upon the relationship between God and the world, the *analogia entis* with knowledge of God demanding 'both a deeper penetration into the image and also a more sublime transcendence beyond it, and the two are not separated one from another, but are the more fully integrated, the more perfectly they are achieved' (1995: 169). The task of theology, according to von Balthasar, is to become exhausted in the 'act of wondering adoration before the unsearchable beauty in every manifestation' (1995: 170).

Since God manifests His glory in all things, the appropriate response is invariably one of celebratory festival and dance. Glory holds sway and hymns of praise are to be sung. The whole celestial hierarchy, joined by men and women, celebrates the Word at the centre, echoing, says von Balthasar, images from the Apocalypse: 'Theology in an all-embracing sense is – as in the pictures of the Apocalypse – the concentric arrangement of heaven and earth, angels and men, in praise around the throne of the Invisible: the Word, that is repeated in ever louder echo, around the

silent centre; sounds around the essential stillness, unapproachable, hidden' (1995: 173). Everything is a sacred veil and in liturgy we ascend the steps of the shrine in order to draw nearer towards the mystery (1995: 173–4). The whole theology of Denys is best regarded as a single, sacred, liturgical act deeply influenced by aesthetic categories:

> To the extent that liturgy is a human, ecclesial act, which, as a response of praise and thanksgiving, seeks to echo the form of the divine revelation, the categories of the aesthetic and of art will play a decisive role in it, and there has scarcely been a theology so deeply informed by aesthetics categories as the liturgical theology of the Areopagite. (1995: 154)

Those initiated and 'kept away from the mockery and laughter of the uninitiated' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 597C) are introduced and led into the mysteries of God, and are then able to acknowledge both the world and the Church as sacred veils, concealing and revealing the divine: 'It veils only in order to initiate more perfectly …' (von Balthasar 1995: 173). The mystery is the silence of God reverberating with glorious sound while remaining simultaneously hidden and revealed. Such, for Denys is the core of a celebratory liturgy: 'The central silence is for Denys not at all the empty silence of non-Christian mysticism, but rather that unique, primordial Word which transcends all the sounding words' (von Balthasar 1995: 174). And with celebration comes peace and its sharing, the peace which all beings long for and desire (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 11, 1987: 949A).

Reflecting on one of the central themes in his corpus, Denys beseeches his readers to seek this 'unifying light' which entails a 'lifting up' from the enigmas and brutality of the variegated material world into a clear light and, as I suggested earlier, it is the images of Scripture as well as the components of the liturgy that are the most reliable means to do this. In *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* Denys appeals to the sacraments to 'Lift up the symbolic garments of enigmas which surround you. Show yourself clearly to our gaze. Fill the eyes of our mind with a unifying and unveiled light' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3, 1987: 428C), knowing well that this ecclesial endeavour is the best means we are given on earth towards seeing the Light itself.

For Denys, any such movement is described as a journey from the perceptible to the intelligible. Intelligible here refers to the glorious beauty and goodness of God which the mind's vision may eventually gaze upon in fullness. It is a spiritual movement from plurality and difference to simplicity and unity, from the spatial plurality of the lower realm to the metaphysical simplicity of the celestial realm (Rorem 1984: 56), and it is through the propensities of religious symbolism that such a transition can be achieved. Such leading upwards is not only an active ascent, but a passive elevation, achieved by God once we put ourselves in the right context (Rorem 1984: 55).

This entails a shift away from the empirical and preoccupied self made possible through and via the symbols. The liturgical features are the means by which we can approach the simplicity of the divine. Sense-based, perceptible things become essential and serve a crucial function. In *Letter* 9, Denys says that we must never

disdain symbols because they 'bear the mark of the divine stamp'. They are the 'manifest images of unspeakable and marvellous sights' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter* 9, 1987: 108C). But more than this – any uplifting is not possible without the symbols, it is the only means we have (Rorem 1984: 105). The point is not to be attracted by such material things for their own sake, but to use them as a means to contemplate higher things. *The Celestial Hierarchy* uses examples of those liturgical symbols which serve such a function, 'the beautiful odours which strike the senses', the lights which are the 'outpouring of an immaterial gift of light' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 1, 1987: 121D). A hermeneutical insight is required therefore, achieved through supernatural grace, the gift given to help humanity understand the riches of symbolic meaning.

What is required is the attainment of a careful use and interpretation of the symbolic – the ability to get behind the symbol, (however dissimilar it is to God), so that the soul might be lifted beyond appearances to the higher things which are not of this world. We must never in this process be deterred or afraid of using 'matter' to describe the things of God since all things owe their existence to the absolute beauty in which they participate. This is where Denys's theology of creation combines with his theology of symbolism. All creation 'keeps, throughout its earthly ranks, some echo of intelligible beauty' (*Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 1987: 144C). The whole of creation (Denys explicitly says 'everything in fact') rests and participates within the realm of the Good and the Beautiful. And the beauty which Denys speaks about is not a remote, ideal type, but an infinitely beautiful manifestation which gathers everything to itself and which never ceases to satisfy. As Hart comments: 'It is the beauty of which the psalmist speaks when he exclaims, "I shall be sated, upon awakening, in beholding thy form (*temuna*)" (17:15) …' (2003: 177). Using matter, argues Denys, one may be truly lifted up to the immaterial beautiful archetypes.

What are we to make of all this? We might question a too easy emphasis on responsive praise towards the manifestation of divine beauty within the cosmos. Ascending 'the steps of the shrine' in a world torn apart by political terrorism and disaster prevent Denys's theology from being too easily assimilated into twenty-first century 'reasoning'. Von Balthasar's 'unmanifest' could well refer, for many in the contemporary West, to its secular meaning and definition – the material manifests nothing other than the material and there is no need to postulate a source to that manifestation. For Denys, however, nothing exists outside the beauty of God, nothing lives beyond it; it is the source of all that exists and this echoes St Paul's idea in his Letter to the Romans (11:36), 'For from Him and through Him and in Him and to Him are all things'. Denys reiterates his theology of creation as participation in the divine beauty, the source of all that is.

A word of warning, however, comes from Denys as he postulates the gap which always exists between the 'intelligible and perceptible', the paradox lying at the heart of Christian revelation – how God both reveals and conceals, is seen and hidden, discloses and retains. He writes: 'Of course, one must be careful to use the similarities as dissimilarities … to avoid one-to-one correspondence, to make the appropriate adjustments as one remembers the great divide between the intelligible and the perceptible' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 1987: 144C). But

even imagery to describe God, which Denys refers to as 'deformed', is able to reinforce the process of uplifting:

> And I myself might not have been stirred from this difficulty to my current inquiry, to an uplifting through a precise explanation of these sacred truths, had I not been troubled by the deformed imagery used by scripture in regard to the angels. My mind was not permitted to dwell on imagery so inadequate, but was provoked to get behind the material show, to get accustomed to the idea of going beyond appearances to those upliftings which are not of this world. (*Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 1987: 145B)

Symbols, therefore, for Denys, lift us up out of our mundane perceptions into a unity with the divine. 'Perceptible images', both liturgical and biblical, perform this role to great effect if interpreted and used appropriately. The soul is then brought into contemplation of the Good and the Beautiful by a movement released by the symbols and activated by God's self-giving love.

Yearning and Ecstasy

The liturgical movement of return is a *yearning* for beauty which raises humanity upward into the divine life in which it synthesizes differences, gradually allowing us to become closer and more like those beings who are 'superior to us' (by which he means those celestial beings of the angelic hierarchy). The Incarnation enables us to look upon the divine ray of Jesus Himself (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1, 198: 372B). It is through the Word made flesh, that God assimilates us to Himself, drawing all differences into a divine unity. Consequently, enlightened by what we have seen in and through Christ, we are able to become agents of God's work ourselves, perfecting others as we have been perfected by those superior to us. We become consecrated and then in turn are able to be consecrators ourselves of this 'mysterious understanding'. 'Formed of light, initiates in God's work, we shall be perfected and bring about perfection' writes Denys (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1, 1987: 372B). This is the Christological core of Denys's theology.

It is natural and appropriate that all creatures yearn for the Good and the Beautiful since such desire (which in turn creates all goodness in the world) is rooted in God. Not allowing itself to remain dormant, the divine beauty issued forth in loving creation (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4, 1987: 708B). Our response to this procession of divine love is *yearning*, a crucial word for Denys, as powerful as love. God's desire is the ultimate ground of our desiring: 'The divine longing is Good seeking good for the sake of the Good' (*Divine Names* 4, 1987: 708B). Denys says that there are numerous Scriptural passages which justify this yearning of and for God is a type of erotic love because it has the capacity 'to effect a unity, an alliance, and a particular commingling in the Beautiful and the Good and the beautiful' (*Divine Names* 4, 1987: 709D). Yearning 'moves the superior to provide for the subordinate, and it stirs the subordinate in a return toward the superior' (*Divine Names* 4, 1987: 709D). Everything becomes caught up in a passionate movement of procession and return, made possible by the Incarnation. Different from Neoplatonism, the movement rests on the incarnate Word of divine love at the centre.

Commenting on the Incarnation, Denys writes that it is a mystery why God undertook to become a man, while at the same time emphasizing that it was out of His desire for us that this occurred;[1] we, as His creatures, are then able to desire Him. Williams suggests that Denys's theology conveys a divine ecstasy, especially when he picks up Ignatius's phrase, 'My *eros* is crucified', maintaining that this divine eros, this longing, is fundamental to all we say of God,

> God comes out of his selfhood in a kind of 'ecstasy' (*ekstasis*, literally, a 'standing outside') when he creates; and his ecstasy is designed to call forth the ecstasy of human beings, responding to him in selfless love, belonging to him and not to themselves. Thus, in the created order there is a perpetual circle of divine and human love, *eros* and ecstasy. (1990: 121)

The procession and return of love is constituted through a relentless desire which enables the lover to live entirely for the beloved, just as Paul no longer lived for himself but for Christ who lived within him. God is both Love and Lover, the yearning and the one yearned for, 'they call him yearning and love because he is the power moving and lifting all things up to himself, for in the end what is he if not beauty and goodness, the one who of himself reveals himself, the good procession of his own transcendent unity?' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4, 1987: 712C).

Denys uses the word 'ecstasy' in its strictest sense: the yearning lover in his movement of desire, starts to belong to the beloved, and is transported away from the self which makes do with lower things and mere self-regard. The language used is that of the selfless lover who is 'beside himself', in ecstasy, caught up in the beloved embrace of the one who releases him from the world of difference and disunity. If we are to assimilate the thrust of Denys's theology into contemporary liturgical thinking, then this emphasis on procession and return needs to be brought to the fore. The dynamic was a natural one for those familiar with Greek thought; the challenge now is to reclaim it with the same vigour. When this occurs, liturgy will take on a new significance and begin to invite participants into a reciprocal act of yearning and love, and more importantly, towards a transformation which entails a process of divinization.

For such yearning desire is the beginning of salvation. What is crucial for Denys, as for many Patristic writers, is the ongoing process of divinization – a process which involves moving out of the darkness of fallen humanity into the redemptive light of Christ. It consists of a gradual realization of who we are – nothing less than divine beings. The Patristic writers had no hesitation in acknowledging this. Through Christ's Incarnation there exists a mystical union between humanity and

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1   Chenu claims Denys demotes the importance of the Incarnation with his hierarchical structure. The sacraments, even the Eucharist, were seen by Denys less as participations in the humanity of Christ and more as rites symbolic of union with the perfect One. Chenu even claims, I think a little unfairly, given Denys's frequent references to the Incarnation in his corpus, that his theology 'threatened the Christian originality of the Incarnation by tracing its procession of the many to the One …' (1968: 85). But what Denys did so imaginatively, claims Chenu, was to situate liturgy in a symbolic structure which released a movement towards the unknown mystery and beauty of God.

God. Deification, what the Greek Fathers term the *theosis* of humanity (Ware 1998: 23), becomes possible through the selfless love of Christ exemplified most acutely in the liturgy. By means of the Incarnation, humanity is lifted up into the mystery of His divinity, a theme I develop further in my discussion of Maximus the Confessor in Chapter 5.

Via the intellect (which means for Denys, that faculty open to the mysteries of God) and through written (scriptural) and largely unwritten (liturgical) means, those things which have remained secret become known through symbolic representation, perfectly suited and adapted to human reception. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is partly devoted to these unwritten but corporeal means and Denys gives an explanation for their use. The doing of sacred acts is on a par with biblical participation. Only to the initiated must such sacred acts be performed, for those with 'weak eyes' will never see the divinization which is possible through absorption into the symbolic and the sacred. Consequently, the use of biblical and liturgical symbols must not be done too eagerly. Through their propensity to conceal and disclose the mysterious secrets of divine beauty, they perform a great service, but their veils perform an important role, protecting the sanctity of the symbols themselves as well as the tender eyes of the uninitiated, who might be harmed by premature illumination (Rorem 1984: 79). Hence Denys's insistence on gradations of sanctity secured by those given power to initiate others. The use of the word *mystery* by Denys refers to a mysterious, spiritual concealment rather than an immediate and personal experience of God; people must be led carefully into the secret. (Rorem 1984: 51).

It is divine accommodation and adaptability through symbolic representation which is at the foundation of God's plan of salvation and the surest way of experiencing his goodness. This is clearly reflected in his hierarchical explanations, both heavenly and earthly. Sometimes the higher orders are those who alone can offer interpretation. In Denys's epistemology, all perceptible beings participate in the divine being. But such beauty cannot be manifest unsparingly – partly because some of our eyes are too weak to see its reality and because initiation into the sacraments is required to see its radiant glory. However, Rorem suggests that: 'Even the most sacred physical objects such as the *myron*, the bread and the cup, are not direct emanations of the divine in any sense of "substantial" presence. Rather, the concept of procession indicates God's self-disclosure under the veil of earthly symbols' (1984: 66). I have some difficulty accepting Rorem's argument here, since for Denys it is the case that the simple, composite unity of God always emanates through the symbolic, which has the capacity to both veil and disclose the divine.

As I have already suggested, for Denys, those beguiled by divine goodness and love experience a corresponding yearning; they are able to have such a zeal for the superior good and the beautiful that it results in a passionate zeal for all those things and beings around them: they are 'carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4, 1987: 712B). And this in turn stirs in others a yearning desire for such zeal. Thus, there exists a never-ending circular movement of love and yearning in which the beautiful and the Good is always being restored to its source, enveloping human desire in its ceaseless return to the Beautiful and Good. Turner suggests that creation for Denys is like 'the divine *eros* in volcanic eruption' (1995: 29). It is the 'erotic outpouring of the divine goodness

into all things, the divine ecstasy, by which the One comes to stand outside itself in the multiple differentiations of the created world, while still retaining its apartness in its self-possessed Oneness' (1995: 29). Just as, one might add, human beings come to stand outside themselves and yet remain themselves for others as they are uplifted by any selfless act of love.

The experience of divine ecstasy is inextricably linked to the liturgy. Denys describes how his friend Hierotheus 'was so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised, that everyone who heard him, everyone who saw him, everyone who knew him (or, rather did not know him) considered him to be inspired, to be speaking with divine praises' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 3, 1987: 684A). The phrase 'experiencing communion with the things praised' echoes the liturgical language of the Eucharist referred to in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: 'The hierarch speaks in praise of the sacred works of God, sets about the performance of the most divine acts, and lifts into view the things praised through the sacredly displayed symbols' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3, 1987: 425D), and again later: 'Then he performs the most divine acts and lifts into view the things praised through the sacredly clothed symbols' (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3, 1987: 444A).

God is involved in a unique form of ecstasy. On commenting upon St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Denys claims that God has an 'ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself' (quoted in R. Williams 2000: 74). God moves out of His own self and yet remains within himself: 'He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4, 1987: 712B). God is drunk with goodness (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter* 9, 1987: 112C). Again, the movement of procession and return is emphasized here as an ecstatic movement – the emptying of the self out of an inebriated goodness, which is reflected in the Incarnation (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 2, 1987: 648D–649A) and the ensuing life and death of Christ.

The ascent towards the divine involves a negation of the self, of symbols and images, of even the liturgy itself. As Williams notes, 'The culmination of this process lies in the achievement of a systematic negation: all that is perceptible and conceptual and personal is left behind … And this systematic negation … will leave the believer with no other ground except union with God' (R. Williams 2000: 76). Like Plotinus (whom I shall discuss in Chapter 4), in his *Mystical Theology*, Denys uses the image of the sculptor removing obstacles in order to carve a statue which can then reveal the hidden beauty of the image: 'The divine hidden beauty can only be revealed when we act like sculptors who set out to carve a statue by removing every obstacle and by the act of clearing' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 2, 1987: 1025B). The statue is the soul which is always there, but is prevented from expressing its true self. The moral and intellectual progress of the self must be changed by the transforming effect of the Eucharist and Christ's working within each person,

> whoever enters into communion with the One cannot proceed to live a divided life, especially if he hopes for a real participation in the One ... It is not enough merely to

withdraw from all wrongdoing … one must ceaselessly and prayerfully be raised up as much as one can toward the ultimate perfection of the Deity. (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2, 1987: 401 A–C)

Other sacraments play a decisive role. Entering into the instruction before baptism, the candidate is reminded of his 'lack of knowledge of the truly beautiful, the absence within himself of a God-possessed life' (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 2, 1987: 396A). Baptism and confirmation are indispensable for bestowing self-knowledge and sacramental rites, the visible signs of invisible things whose source and meaning is divine.

'Luminous darkness' – the Silence beyond Affirmation and Negation

The challenge, therefore, in Denys's notion of the spiritual life, is to move closer to the intelligible by means of the perceptible and the sensual. Then, progressively, to discard this 'noetic' realm by an approach towards silence and ineffability. Denys is careful to demonstrate the importance and, at the same time, temporary and transitional nature of language and symbolism, since their function is to 'lift up' aspirants towards that which is beyond representation, rather like the Buddhist story of the raft which needs to be discarded when the river of *samsara* is crossed. Denys eventually wants to get humanity to a point where both linguistic affirmations or negations and liturgical symbols are seen as being necessary but ultimately requiring abandonment. Even though they offer an indispensable vehicle, we need to move beyond them, for Scripture itself tells us that 'there dwells the One who is beyond all things' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1, 1987: 1000C). In Chapter 5 of *The Mystical Theology*, Denys puts it succinctly:

> There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth – it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is beyond every assertion …' (*Mystical Theology* 5, 1987: 1048A–B)

This 'act of clearing' presents us again with a paradox in Denys's scheme of things since we have already seen how symbolic representation through divine emanation and participation is recommended as the primary means of 'uplifting'. Here we encounter a characteristic paradox in Denys since he wants both to affirm the indispensable importance of the material which is penetrated with the divine rays of its source and at the same time to deny its absoluteness. As the clearing occurs, so does the progression.

The supplicatory prayer at the beginning of *The Mystical Theology* asks the Trinity to 'Lead us up beyond unknowing and light' where the 'mysteries of God's Word / lie simple, absolute and unchangeable / in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence' (*Mystical Theology* 1, 1987: 997A). This is the spiritual challenge and the ultimate journey. Taking Moses as an example, he says that when approaching God he entered into the mysterious darkness of unknowing and then 'wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything' (*Mystical Theology* 1, 1987: 1001A). This passage needs to be understood

liturgically and most likely refers to the celebrant's entry into the sanctuary, the liturgical mystery, a place 'beyond everything', but which paradoxically requires sensible things which will lead others to that mysterious place.

In *The Mystical Theology* a liturgical interpretation is key to its meaning and understanding. The work is essentially about the celebrant's ascent to the altar, and has a communal resonance, 'something that takes place with, and on behalf of, the whole people of God', writes Louth (1989: 31). Denys uses language reminiscent of religious ritual and the Sinai events correspond to the liturgical experience of the hierarch (bishop), who on entering the 'truly mysterious darkness of unknowing' becomes 'wrapped in the intangible and the invisible' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1, 1987: 1001A). Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of knowledge; it knows 'beyond the mind by knowing nothing' (*Mystical Theology* 1, 1987: 1001A).

This echoes verses in *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Divine Names* where Denys emphasizes the importance of contemplation: 'With eyes that look beyond the world' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 4, 1987: 177C) and 'rising with eyes that see beyond the cosmos' we begin 'to contemplate all things' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 5, 1987: 821B). Gregory of Nyssa similarly uses the story of Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai in his *Life of Moses* but here the liturgical analogy is more explicit and clear than in Denys's account. In the latter the ascent is by means of and through the perceptible and conceptual and then beyond them, and liturgy and Scripture act as major players in the 'lifting up' process for the community. In particular, Denys likes the method adopted by the Scriptural writers, since biblical texts assist us to move beyond our own finite understanding of the world and the self. As McIntosh writes, 'In Dionysius' view scripture bears within itself a momentum leading its interpretative community through an exegetical transformation that is essentially ecstatic in nature' (1998: 46).

Denys offers a subtle exposition of the uses of language in relation to the divine. God transcends all affirmations and negations but not all affirmations are equal and not all negations are equally appropriate. But he also argues that incongruous dissimilarities of the divine can be useful since they act as a goad for us to seek a higher meaning and take account of our tendency to be satisfied by the material (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 1987: 141B). The point that Denys wants to emphasize is that all language collapses, often into paradox, when we use it to express the divine. We must affirm and deny all things about God at the same time and realize there is no contradiction between the two since God is both – for example, brilliant darkness and neither, neither lightness nor darkness. This is simply another way of saying that the negation of the negation is used to demonstrate the futile inadequacy of religious language. Language fails and only paradox or silence or both remain. In all this, Turner reminds us of Denys's neo-Platonic influence:

> What Denys had to say about theological language is but the transposition of the Platonic dialectics of the Cave Allegory into the domain of discourse. If the light of the sun is a mind-stunning darkness, so is the reality of the divine a language-defeating silence. (1995: 22)

Ironically, it seems, one of Denys's major works is devoted to the names of God. All divine names are helpful and have their warrant in Scripture. What is required, therefore, is a theological method – the mastering of a sound biblical hermeneutics to unlock the hidden mysteries. Indeed, one central context for Denys's negative theology is the interpretation of Scripture. Affirmation and negation are not mutually exclusive, more like two ways of viewing the same thing. The cataphatic and apophatic become for Denys two sides of the same coin – especially useful when used in conjunction. God is both the nameless One and the One of many names (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 1987: 596A). This is why Rorem can argue that,

> A given biblical statement about God or about the angels is carefully weighed in order to determine in what sense it is true and can thus be affirmed, and in what sense it is false and should be denied ... In such evaluation, affirmation and denial *combine* to yield an intelligible interpretation which transcends the symbols' initial level of sense perception. (1984: 89)

The figure of Hierotheus also presents us with an insight into Denys's liturgical concerns. He is interesting to Denys because he speaks of his visions and seems to possess a mystical awareness and insight, one most likely linked to a profound understanding of the mysteries of the sacraments and the Scriptures. Hierotheus was probably a celebrant of the liturgy since the second account of his vision implies a liturgical context (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 3, 1987: 2; Louth 1989: 29). He had the special ability to see into the 'mystery' of the Christian liturgy and to offer insights about it to others. There is another account, too, besides the famous Moses story in *The Mystical Theology*, of one Carpus, whom Denys writes about in *Letter* 8, who has a vision which is explicitly recounted in liturgical language. McIntosh is right to insist that Denys's theology is not to blame for instigating the 'modern' notion of mysticism as an individual, psychological experience of the divine but is one rooted deeply in communal and ecclesial contexts, primarily liturgical. As he writes, 'the mystical depth encountered by the spiritual seeker is not found by a purely interior ascent of the soul, but rather that such a Neo-Platonic itinerary has been re-contextualised in the sacramental life of the community' (1998: 45).

How might Denys's theology assist the liturgical practices of the twenty-first century? Certainly, his emphasis on symbolic materiality is one which repays careful attention as he acknowledges its power to lift worshippers to the splendour and beauty of God. Sometimes this ascent is reflected in hymns, at other times the most appropriate response is silence, but what is crucial is the judicious use of the material to encourage an anagogic ascent to take place. The difficulty here is whether liturgical symbols can sustain a movement so straightforwardly recognized by Denys. If the twelfth century strengthened the symbolic mentality, the same might be said in reverse for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The disenchantment of modernity (Torevell 2000b) stripped the symbolic imagination and its recovery is far from restored. Symbols are not so simply interpreted, nor is their use so readily adapted within liturgical contexts as they were during Denys's time.

But at the same time, I want to suggest strongly that Denys's theology is potentially rich for the liturgy of the twenty-first century. It is plain that he regards the use of the symbolic in liturgy as the superior mode of entry into the mysterious beauty of God. As well as a theologian renowned for his apophatic insight, we see an early and important liturgist rooted in a mystical way of understanding the world. He offers both wisdom about the ineffable nature of God, and, more significantly in relation to this, insights into the nature, purpose and limits of the apparatus of worship itself. Steeped in the liturgies of his own Christian community, he could never see any reason to divorce theology from the well-established sacramental and liturgical models of the *ecclesia*. He secures his theology, therefore, in a cosmic and earthly hierarchy attuned to giving praise and thanksgiving. It is fitting, therefore, to read Denys's works as unique liturgical–apophatic treatises, and to see in their creative inseparability a vision for the liturgy of the future.

Let me develop further Denys's unique contribution to liturgy and its implications for today. Like St Augustine in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, Denys is keen to demonstrate that the God beyond words offers us an unfailing invitation to worship. But, whereas St Augustine demonstrates the usefulness of language as a vehicle of praise, the latter points to the ultimate failure of language. As Jantzen indicates,

> whereas Dionysius' emphasis was to point out the idolatrous consequences of a fixation on any names of God, and thereby to encourage the intellectual ascent which would bring about the *ekstasis* of the intellect, Augustine's tone is rather one of encouragement in the creative use of language on the grounds that such verbal tributes are received by God as praise. (1995: 283)

Although I think Jantzen underestimates the importance of the liturgical contexts in which Denys was often writing (which situated his theology in the *ecclesia*), her critique of Denys is worth noting, especially in regard to his use of language and the absence of women in his hierarchy (a word, incidentally, he invented). Jantzen claims that Denys stresses the intellect and suggests that it is understanding which enables the initiate to move from a state of ignorance to enlightenment. Accepting a Platonic understanding of knowledge, union with God comes about through the knowing mind. God's goodness consists in enlightening the individual mind so that it may move, not from a state of sin, but from a state of ignorance. Denys stresses knowledge, not love, in any ascent, says Jantzen, a stepping stone towards the place where human reason itself collapses into a silence beyond all knowing (1995: 105). While in general terms this is evident, it needs to be combined, I think, with the recognition that many sacramental discussions in Denys emphasize love. It is the love of God which moves those to seek baptism for others. Louth points out that the Eucharist centres on God's processional love overflowing into us, and our response of love in return (1989: 60). The sacramental passages in Denys centre around *loving movement* as well as secret knowledge. It is therefore misleading to dissociate Denys from any concern for love in the mystical tradition. The emphasis on the importance of a symbolic mentality and a passionate yearning desire for the God of beauty, surprisingly overlooked by Jantzen, also prevents his theology from becoming too easily associated with reason and the intellect, or at least it requires an

exposition into what kind of understanding or knowing the symbolic and aesthetic calls for and entails.

It is worth noting too that for Denys the Incarnation is the revelation of hidden love, a mystery which cannot be expressed in words or clarified in the mind (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter* 3, 1987). The mystery is expressed in the deeds of Christ, whose 'unspeakable, incomprehensible goodness' comes lovingly, and for example, 'who is "kind to the ungrateful", "makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good" and he goes so far as to " lay down his life" for those who run away from him' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter* 8, 1987: 1088B). Again Denys offers us an affirmation of the light of God in the deeds of Christ but at the same time negates it by saying the mystery of God can never be fully revealed. The Word which goes forth must be remembered as the Word which is inexpressible, the divine silence which is beyond sound and articulation. Liturgy must draw those present into that silence which is at the centre of the words and symbols and to which they point; it must therefore be essentially *contemplative*. As a consequence, liturgy makes a serious demand on the 'hierarch' (the bishop) – he must be trained in the contemplation of the divine and the still – and in his active ministry he must hold fast to contemplation. For without this meditative inclination and ability to render the silence beyond the symbolic, liturgy will fail to do its job – to draw all worshippers towards and into the inexpressible love of God.

Ecclesiastical and Celestial Hierarchies

Although Denys postulates a hierarchical and male structure to both the *ecclesia* and the cosmos in a manner which is unsettling to modern thinking, his primary aim is to draw people into the beauty of God. His theological structure explains how this is achieved. Everyone in the hierarchy is partly there to entice others into the divine light and this hinges on a Trinitarian notion of the ceaseless outpouring of divine love towards the 'other' in God and to those lower down the hierarchical scale. In its all-creative goodness the Trinity imparts 'being, life, wisdom and the other gifts …'. As McIntosh says, 'the divine yearning (*eros*) for the other causes there to be an other both in Godself and beyond' (1998: 48).

The earthly hierarchy consists of a triad of sacraments, ministers and those to whom they minister. There are three sacraments, three orders of clergy and three orders of laity. The sacraments are illumination (baptism), gathering together (Eucharist – *synaxis*) and the sacrament of oil (*myron*). The three orders of clergy are: hierarchs, priests and ministers, which are recognized now as bishops, priests and deacons. The three orders of laity are monks, the 'sacred' people or laity and those who have yet to be initiated. The ordering corresponds to the process of purification (uninitiated), illumination (laity) and perfection (monks = contemplative order). Deacons purify, the priests' task is concerned with illumination and the hierarchy's primary function is to perfect.

It is the function of the hierarchy to bring people closer to the Light, a movement from non-being to being. It must be remembered that the higher orders contain all that is in those beneath them and the lower orders are simply a less intense form of those above. It is not a question of having parts of the whole Light, but rather that each has the whole to the degree that has been apportioned to their status. It is the

mutual and loving relationality of the Trinity which helps us to understand Denys's view of hierarchy, and the best way to describe the relation of the hierarchy to God is 'theophany'. This implies the world is an emanation and manifestation of God in which beings closer to God manifest God to those furthest away. Each member of the hierarchy must evangelize those subordinate to them.

In conjunction with his ecclesial hierarchy, Denys's text *The Celestial Hierarchy* describes the structure and role of the angelic powers and the principles that govern hierarchical order. Everything is, in a sense, projected out from God. A hierarchy is a 'sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine. The beauty of God – so simple, so good, so much the source of perfection – is completely uncontaminated by dissimilarity. It reaches out to grant every being, according to merit, a share of light …' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 3, 1987: 164D). Hierarchy

> causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendour, they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale. (*Celestial Hierarchy* 3, 1987: 165A)

The angels provide us with revelations of the divine. The Word of God taught us that the law was given to us by the angels and has indicated that there are nine explanatory designations for the heavenly beings, divided into three, three-fold groups (*Celestial Hierarchy* 6, 1987: 200D). The first group is forever around God – they possess many eyes and many wings and are called in Hebrew 'cherubim' and 'seraphim'. The second group is made up of 'authorities', 'dominions' and 'powers'. And the third is the group of angels, archangels and principalities (*Celestial Hierarchy* 6, 1987: 201A). Denys assigns the activity of contemplation to the first group. This is because they are full of a superior light and are filled with contemplation of the One who is the cause and source of all beauty. They have entered into communion with Jesus and being like God is their unique gift. In a special manner they share in God's divine activities and his loving virtues. They are perfect because they possess a primary and supreme deification and have an understanding of God's work (*Celestial Hierarchy* 7, 1987: 208C–D). Liturgically, too, the first group play an important role, since they communicate the beauty of God by their worship and teach those on earth their hymns of praise. They proclaim 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place', and thunder out the sanctus 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory' (*Celestial Hierarchy* 7, 1987: 212B).

Certainly, talk of angels and a celestial hierarchy might at first appear strange to twenty-first century ears. But the movement of ascent from the liturgical altar to the heavenly altar is still central to much contemporary liturgical understanding, especially in the Roman Catholic tradition, and reflects a unified community of praise and adoration from the earthly to the heavenly. The priest during the first Eucharistic prayer of the Roman Rite after the consecration states, 'Almighty God, we pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven / Then as we receive from this altar the sacred body and blood of your Son / let us be filled with

every grace and blessing' (*Sacramentary*, 1985: 546). During the second Eucharistic prayer, too, the priest reads before the *sanctus*, 'And so we join the angels and the saints in proclaiming your glory' (*Sacramentary*, 1985: 548). There is a sense throughout much of contemporary Roman Catholic liturgy that worshippers are part of a much greater assembly of God's people living and dead and that the angels are part of this entourage of praise. Denys's notion of a celestial hierarchy might be more analytically prescribed than some of us would wish, but the adoption of some of his central liturgical concerns for the present day are less problematic than first conceived.

Sacraments: Eucharist (the Rite of Synaxis) and the Sacrament of the Oil

Denys's distinctive understanding of sacraments is crucial for his liturgical theology. He sees baptism as a form of rebirth which allows the process of deification to progress. The sacrament secures a divide between a previous life once lived and a new rebirth in Christ, symbolized by the candidate stripping and a renunciation of Satan facing West, followed by confessing Christ facing East. The new life will be a struggle, however. The athletic imagery used by Denys when describing the initiation into the divine mysteries is suited to his purposes, the way of 'real' life entails a battle or struggle: 'And so the initiate will quite gladly hurl himself into what he knows to be divine contests and he will follow scrupulously the wise rules of the game' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2, 1987: 404A). But baptism also brings courage, an orientation towards the divine One, order, form and light. One typological reference refers to how the triple immersion into the waters of baptism reflects the three days Christ was in the tomb, but which then results in new life and meaning to the initiated. The immersion brings the soul into the invisible realm as an illuminating experience, and then light shines through all the candidate's life. The transition is always one from lower to higher things and includes a tri-part movement of purification, illumination and perfection (von Balthasar 1995: 197).

   The celebration of the Eucharist is noteworthy since it reflects the Neoplatonic emphasis of procession and return through the censing of the altar by the hierarch as he moves from the sanctuary to the furthest part of the nave and back again, symbolizing a procession and return motif – God moves out of love, creating all things and then draws all back to Himself, a movement out without any loss to His own unity (Louth 1989: 61). Denys is interested in this *symbolism of movement* and in the elevation and distribution of the Eucharist, 'a reality that is composite and visible' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3, 1987: 444A). There is no mention of what actually happens to the sacred elements and the question of transubstantiation, which has dogged the Christian Church to the present, is absent. Denys is more concerned about ritual movement which is able to reflect his theology of procession and return. He emphasizes the distribution of the One by the bishop, who moves out to the congregation and gives them what he has been contemplating and then returns to his own contemplation (Louth 1989: 61). The hidden divinity of Jesus which enters the world of multiplicity through the Incarnation is now transformed into bread and wine during the sacramental rite. The central role of the celebrant is centred around elevation and distribution – the veiled becomes not only

unveiled but distributed and reflects the procession of love Denys is concerned to stress in his theology.

The sacrament of the oil emphasizes two things: First, something hidden, secret and kept away from the eyes of the profane, reflected in the 12 folds of the cloth symbolizing the 12 wings of the seraphim who veil the presence of God, the means by which the sacrament communicates an inner reality to us. Second, this inner reality is Jesus Himself – the oil is hidden but its fragrance is felt by all around. The oil being composite, both balsam and olive oil, comes to represent Jesus, God and man, and is used to consecrate all things, being the hidden Jesus revealed in the form of oil. That is why Denys can speak of the 'transcendent fragrance of the divine Jesus' (quoted in Louth 1989: 64). Other sacraments are incomplete because they do not perfect our 'gathering' to the One. Denys describes the oil used at the end of baptism as 'most theurgic' and 'most deifying' (quoted in Louth 1989: 65).

Denys's Liturgical Influence Accepted and Denied

The Christian Church in the second and third parts of the twelfth century was deeply influenced by Denys's theology, and its symbolist mentality owed a great deal to his influence (Chenu 1968).[2] His taking from Platonism of two worlds – the intelligible and the sense-perceptible – became interspersed with an emphasis on symbolic materiality and the role they were to play in the 'uplifting' process towards the immortal world. For Denys, the symbol surpassed language as a way into the mystery of God. It was the starting point of initiation and knowledge. As Chenu claims, the symbol 'was no more reducible to analysis than the mystery it made present' (1968: 126–7). But as I have indicated, for Denys (in contrast to Augustine, whom I shall discuss in Chapter 2), all created things participate in and emanate from divine Beauty. Like Plotinus, Denys believes that all things flow from this source and long to return; because it is the source it is also the goal (Jantzen 2002: 440). Unlike Augustine, who is drawn to the source of Love out of a sense of sinfulness and shame, for Denys it is the plenitude of divine love overflowing into the created order which prompts a movement of return. As Jantzen puts it, 'For Augustine desire, including desire for God, is premised upon a lack: his own sinfulness and mortality from which he longs to be set free. For the Pseudo-Dionysius, desire is premised upon plenitude: overflowing divine beauty evokes

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2   Later wide-ranging uses of Denys have inevitably drawn upon those aspects of his work to suit varying purposes. Writers like the twelfth-century Abbot Suger of the Abbey St Denis in Paris drew from his corpus in explaining the Abbey's architectural features, in particular its emphasis on securing the worshippers' ascent to the divine. Thomas Gallus, widely read in the Middle Ages, also merged Denys's apophaticism with his own affective approach to spirituality. He re-interpreted Denys's ascent to the unknown God as essentially an experience of affective love. McGinn comments, 'Gallus' Dionysianism rests on two significant innovations: a reinterpretation of the ascent to the unknown God which places the experience of affective love above all cognition, and a process whereby the angelic hierarchies are treated primarily as the inner powers of the soul to be energised and set in order to achieve loving union' (1998: 80). Gallus believed that God is unknowable but that he has revealed Himself in love and, therefore, love has a distinctive path to Him.

generous reciprocal response' (2002: 440). For Denys, the Fall is seen therefore more in terms of an ever-decreasing distance from the source of Beauty. Darkness is the absence of light, just as sin is the absence of beauty. But to be and to exist is in itself to be beautiful and liturgy is the celebration of this beauty in human life and creation allied to a movement towards its source. For Augustine, although evil is the privation of goodness, there is a far more urgent warning that the beauty of creation and materiality might act as a snare to spiritual endeavour rather than a participatory starting point towards the source of beauty.

Although Denys's theology was influential in the Middle Ages and in particular on Aquinas's writings, it is noticeable that after the Reformation it was the Augustinian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and an emphasis on language in relation to the sacraments which were to steer the development of much theological and liturgical thinking. Creation was no longer, as in Denys, a simple matter of the emanation of the divine Beauty. In Augustine there is always an ambivalence about the beauty of creation (lest it acts as a temptation away from God) and a separation between the Creator and His creation. There is a considerable gap between Denys's idea of creation as emanating from and participating in the divine, and Augustine's notion of creation as *ex nihilo*. The latter emphasis was to be further increased by the Protestant Reformation and its insistence on a worship of the Word and its overriding attention to doctrine, as I shall show in Chapter 3. The result was as disastrous as it was divisive, for it was responsible for marginalizing and sometimes banishing a full-bodied understanding of the world's beauty and of separating the world from its source; the beauty of the world started to become under suspicion (Jantzen 2002: 442).

Disappointingly, therefore, it was not Denys's understanding of liturgy, entailing symbolic and aesthetic sensibility, which was to dominate the development of the Western Roman Rite, but Augustine's. According to the latter, it was not possible to have a sacrament without the inclusion of human words or concepts. Words rather than symbolic materiality became dominant. Human language must be conjoined to the elements of nature to make sacraments efficacious and proper. In *De Sacramentis* Augustine is keen to explain the operation of the sacraments and their definitive character, linked as they are to a three-fold historical analysis by their reference to the past, their vivification of the present and their foreshadowing of the future. Therefore, nature, history and interpretation begin to merge in the symbolism of the sacraments as visible forms taken from the elements of nature – water, bread, oil, salt, ash – become associated with the events of salvation history. Such connections have lasted until the present day as natural elements become materials primarily for *allegorical instruction* rather than powerful manifestations of divine beauty and mystery. If Denys's theology had prevailed, more emphasis would have been placed on the mysterious power of symbolic materiality to lift worshippers towards the source of divine Beauty already experienced in creation. In contrast, the use of language and in particular, allegory, became a cognitive and instructive device centred around language and meaning. Augustine's influence on the celebration of the mass produced a rite which became centred around a historical reconstruction of the episodes of Christ's passion, rather than a symbolic sacrificial meal (Chenu 1968). And words became central to its efficacy.

Hence we see the legacy of Augustine rather than Denys in the historical development of liturgy, as worship becomes more concerned with rational instruction, historical re-enactment and allegorical interpretation, rather than ritual access into mysterious beauty secured by material symbolism. The great advantage of symbolism was that it maintained an *aesthetic participation* in the ascent towards the divine. Allegory operated differently – it never started from aesthetic appreciation but primarily from critical analysis. This was and still is its failing as a primary tool in liturgy. My case for a renewed liturgy of the twenty-first century rests on the reclamation of the power of symbolic materiality to invite a form of participation which is largely aesthetic and which rests on a movement towards mystery and beauty already experienced. All it needed to achieve this was a liturgical theology which took seriously, and without suspicion, the beauty of the world. This will be pursued further in the ensuing chapters.

Images as Divine Veils which Reveal 'Things Beyond Being' – St John of Damascus: *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*

On the First Sunday in Lent in the Christian Orthodox calendar a major liturgy takes place called the Feast of Orthodoxy. It celebrates the time when iconoclasm (the destruction of religious images and icons due to their perceived association with idolatry and contravention of the second commandment) was lifted. The ban on religious images inaugurated in 726 CE by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III, attacked a widespread and popular religious practice, even though from the sixth century onwards the devout veneration of images had played an important role both publicly and privately in the formation of Christian communities and families. For example, the successful defeat of invading armies – the Slavs and Avars, the Arabs and Persians – was often attributed to the intercession of the saints whose splendour they saw imaged before them and to whom they frequently sought refuge. The iconophile Patriarch, Germanus, was forced to resign during this difficult period and although Popes Gregory II and III objected, Leo III's son, Constantine V, formulated a theological defence of the destruction of images, claiming at the Council of Hiereia that the practice of displaying images was unacceptable and amounted to either Nestorian heresy (since it believed that Christ had two separate persons, one divine and the other human, but only one could be represented) or Eutychian heresy (since it claimed that after the Incarnation, Christ had only one nature, the divine, into which the human had been fully absorbed). Only the Eucharist, it was claimed, could represent Christ, both God and man.

For recalcitrant monks, brutal persecution, including blinding, exile and forcing into marriage, continued until Constantine V's son, Leo IV (775–80 CE), relaxed the policy, and in 787 the Empress Irene convened the Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, at which the employment of religious imagery was restored and the notion of veneration defined. However, for the East this was not the end of the battle since with the accession of Leo V, Nicaea's teaching was annulled and persecution arose again. Eventually, however, the iconophiles, led by Theodore the Studite, finally won the theological argument and in 843 the Empress Theodore proclaimed a feast day in honour of the restoration and employment of images.

During this controversial time one of the most prominent defenders of icons was the eighth-century St John of Damascus, a monk who lived for a good deal of his life near Jerusalem and who died in *circa* 750. Because he was resident a good distance from the Byzantine Empire, he was able initially to criticize the policy of the Emperor quite freely, but in 754 at a synod held in Chalcedon, he was publicly condemned as someone openly giving support to the veneration of icons (Binns 2002). St John wrote on three different occasions about the importance of religious images, and these works have now become known as *Three Treatises* (2003). These works are part of a broader picture, however, since they reflect St John's involvement in the defence of Christian orthodoxy (indeed he wrote a piece entitled *On the Orthodox Faith*) and demonstrate the wider significance of this debate. They belong, therefore, to a tradition which attempts to define what Christianity is and how it might be practised. Writing about the treatises, Louth suggests that, 'Attacking images, St John seems to be saying, is not just to attack the actual icons, but more seriously to threaten something central to the whole fabric of Christian theology' (Louth in St John of Damascus 2003: 10–11). Without this successful defence the story of Christianity might have been a different one and the displacement of beauty in the Western symbolic even more accentuated. For St John, the veneration of images was central to what being a Christian entails and the ban nothing less than heresy itself. At the close of the *First Treatise* he condemns the Emperor for usurping the role of the bishops in deciding what Christian belief and practice are about.

St John starts his defence prayerfully, humbly beseeching God to assist his mind in the formulation of words so that he might be able to write the truth. His purpose is not to conquer with arrogance, but to hold out a hand in the fight for the truth (2003: 21). In the *First Treatise*, St John skilfully brings into play the importance of the Incarnation. God took on a material form when he became man, therefore in worshipping one God, Christians also worship a Trinity of persons, one of whom took on a material form for our very eyes to see: 'Therefore, I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible but as he became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood' (2003: 22). In order to refute the allegation of idolatry, St John makes a distinction between the exclusive worship of the One true God (*latreia*), and veneration of those things which depict or represent Him. There is an important difference. For example, he points out how Abraham venerated the sons of Emmor, just as Jacob venerated Esau his brother and Pharaoh the Egyptian, bowing in veneration over the head of his staff. Veneration entails honour and respect to those who excel on account of something worthy. But worship is entirely different: 'The veneration of worship is one thing, veneration offered in honour to those who excel on account of something worthy is another' (2003: 25) and therefore 'One should not offer veneration of worship to creation instead of the creator, but only to the One who fashioned all' (2003: 23).

Besides, argues St John, it is incumbent upon us to depict the One who obediently 'accepted to be seen' (2003: 24). It is right and proper to depict Christ who became visible for our sake, his 'ineffable descent, his birth from the Virgin, his being baptised in the Jordan, his transfiguration on Tabor … depict all these in words and colours' (2003: 24). Because the one who was formless, without measure or size, unimaginable and bodiless, came to earth and took the form of a slave and put on

the characteristics of a body, then we must depict Him with confidence and 'set up to view the One who has accepted to be seen' (2003: 24). It is due to God's love that the formless becomes form. Supported by Denys's claim that the icons and symbols of Scripture and 'priestly traditions' are divine veils necessary to reveal to the senses 'things beyond being', St John reiterates his theological argument that images arouse the memory of divine things and in the process stir up zeal:

> If it belongs to God's love for human kind to provide forms and figures for what is formless and without figure and for what is simple and without shape in accordance with our analogy, how then should we not form images analogous to us of what we see in forms and shapes to arouse our memory and from memory arouse zeal? (2003: 40)

And he adds, 'Zeal comes about by seeing, for example, the perseverance of the martyr, the recompense of the crowns …' (2003: 46). St John goes on to specifically discuss the notion of the image which lies at the heart of the controversy. Notice, says St John, the difference between an image and the Incarnate Son. An image is a likeness depicting an archetype, but possessing some difference from it; the Son, on the other hand, 'is a living, natural and undeviating image of the Father, bearing in himself the whole Father, equal to him in every respect …' (2003: 25). Images perform invaluable functions. Again drawing from Denys's wisdom, St John argues that images can portray things which are about to happen, they are 'predeterminations': for instance, in the Old Testament, many things have been depicted before they come to pass. He argues, for example, that when Moses was about to erect the tabernacle he was instructed to make everything as shown on the mountain. The law was a foreshadowing of an image of the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, if the tabernacle is an image of a figure to come, how then can the law command that images not be drawn?

St John finds particular support in Denys's comments about the use of symbols as images of ineffable visions. Liturgical (and Scriptural) traditions offer divine veils through which the love of God may be perceived through the senses. He quotes St Basil, who commends the artist's craft because he is able to depict more clearly than any sermons, the glorious martyrdom of blessed Barlaam: 'you make radiant with the colours of your wisdom. Overwhelmed by you, I will refrain from describing the martyr's deeds of valour ... I see the struggle depicted most exactly by you, with his hand in the fire; I see the combatant, radiant with joy, depicted in your image. Let the demons howl, as they are now struck down by the valiant deeds of the martyrs now manifest in you' (2003: 42).Why, asks St John, do the iconoclasts take away such images which constitute memory and sustain zeal? Memory comes through word *and* images, their function is one and the same (2003: 44). Images are set up as aids to remembering the things of God, to help us recollect divine activities and to assist us in recalling our own salvation story. And for those who say, do not depict the saints, St John adds that this is as bad as claiming that the truth is false, for to make an image of Christ as glorified and then to spurn the saints, is to deny what the Lord Himself says – that He shall glorify those who give glory to Him. St John is always keen, however, unless there be any misunderstanding, to emphasize that such saints do not share a hypostatic union with God as the Son did, who became God by nature, but they do participate in the divine life.

Images also provide some *access to the invisible* and without them we would be entirely lost in our search for God. Gregory of Nazianzen knew all too readily that the mind, in its futile struggle to get beyond corporeal things, eventually realizes its impotence; God, therefore, actually provides us with familiar and natural reference points, touchstones to help us access the formless, divine light. The divine Word itself foreknows our need for such 'analogies' to assist us in our ascent to the divine and in nature we see things which image the divine. For example, the Holy Trinity imaged in the light and rays of the sun, or in a fountain welling up or in the sight and perfume of a rose. St John is adamant that in venerating icons Christians do not venerate matter itself. What they venerate is the fashioner of matter who became matter for the sake of the world. 'I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation …' (2003: 29). St John piles up example after example to make his point: the blessed wood of the cross, the place of the skull, the holy tomb, the ink and the all-holy book, the life-bearing table which offers us the bread of life and, of course, the body and blood of the Lord. Do not be like the Manichees, says St John, who despise matter. Furthermore, since the Incarnation of the Word (unlike Israel during the Old Testament), we have been able to see 'with unveiled face' the glory of God in Christ. Consequently, it is most fitting that this glory is portrayed in images.

Gregory of Nyssa offers St John support by recalling how, on seeing the image of Abraham binding his son Isaac, 'he has not been able to pass from seeing it without tears so skilfully does the artist bring this story to my sight' (quoted in St John of Damascus 2003: 48). Images invariably prompt an affective awakening in us which is helpful for our salvation. Anyway, argues St John, liturgy itself has always used material things and could not operate without them. If you argue that God ought only to be apprehended 'spiritually', then we must take away everything bodily – the lights, the incense, the vocal prayer, the bread and wine, the oil of chrismation, the cross: 'Either take away the reverence offered to all these, as impossible, or do not reject the honour of the images' (2003: 43).

The *Second Treatise* is a modified and simplified version of the first and adds information about developments in Byzantine iconoclasm and in Cyprus. In the *Third Treatise* St John has a short section specifically devoted to answering the question of the purpose of images and here he gives us his most direct answer with reference to humanity. Images make manifest something which is hidden and since souls are veiled by bodies, images are especially designed for our constitution to open up what is hidden for our spiritual well-being and salvation. As we learn from what is hidden we begin to be filled with desire and zeal for that which is good rather than its reverse.

There are different kinds of images: first, natural images of which the most perfect example is the incarnate Son who shows in himself the Father. Second, images which show what is soon to come about. Third, images which work through imitation – human kind is created in the image and likeness of God the Father. Fourth is the use in Scripture. Fifth, those which prefigure what is to come about, and finally the sixth – images which arouse the memory of past events, especially acts of virtue and bravery. Later St John records the types of veneration possible: the first, worship

to God alone; next comes wonder and desire because of God's natural glory; the third type is thanksgiving, the fourth springs from our neediness and hope in God's kindness; and the fifth from repentance and confession.

The entire debate was never an argument about portraying the Father alone, for such was generally regarded as heresy. The Seventh Ecumenical Council re-stated the teaching of Pope Gregory II (669–731) that the Father should never be represented except by the Son, because no-one knows what the Father is like. The only image possible is either no image at all, or the image of the Son who has made visible His Trinitarian relationship with the Father. Nevertheless, the practice of portraying the Father alone has been widespread since the seventeenth century both in the East and in the West. The victory of St John of Damascus allowed a much greater status to be given to the material and the aesthetic but his theology never assumed a doctrine of divine emanation and participation as envisaged by Denys, although many of the Byzantine iconophiles would have accepted Denys's teachings about the beauty of the world (Jantzen 2002: 445).

Our Nature as Imago Dei

The iconoclastic debate is also an episode about *imago Dei* in human nature. Ward takes the story of St John of Damascus concerning the making of the first icon of Christ which was on exhibition in the city of Edessa during St John's time and contextualizes it in terms of beauty, desire and the image of God in humanity. He records how St John relates the episode:

> When Abgar was lord of the city of Edessenes, he sent an artist to make a portrait of the Lord. When the artist was unable to do this because of the radiance of His face, the Lord Himself pressed a bit of cloth to His own sacred and life-giving face and left His own image on the cloth and so sent this to Abgar who had earnestly desired it. (Quoted in Ward 2003: 37)

For Ward what is interesting about this story is the criteria governing the manifestation of beauty. Desire is the central dynamic since this is the animator of Abgar's intention. As he comments, 'The structure of the story is the satisfaction of that desire that is its catalyst – the image of Christ is given to that person who "had so earnestly desired it"' (2003: 39). But the event entails more than this. Abgar's yearning desire enables him to recognize that the cloth given to him is in fact Christ's, even though he had never encountered this before. As Ward writes, 'Desire reaches forward toward that which it already, inchoately, possesses. It apprehends that which it cannot see and then attains an understanding of that apprehension in the delivery of what it desired. The beautiful becomes, then, a mode of recognition in an operation of desire' (2003: 39). Salvation constitutes a return to the knowledge that one is made in the image of God. We recognize the truth, goodness and beauty of the world because these are in our own nature and despite our weaknesses call us to recognize the relationship between ourselves and the saints or Christ.

Sacred images then arouse within us our own ineffable image, our own unfathomable self since they recall our own divine image and proceed naturally due to this divine gift. What is recognized in the beautiful is its paradisial participation,

a glimpse of innocent beauty uncontaminated by the Fall, a gift of divine splendour, and our most fitting response is reverence, awe and worship, *latreia* according to St John. The Roman Catholic Church's insistence on the sanctity of human life partly rests upon this assumption – we do not worship others but we have a sense of awe for their nature, which is sacred and must not be violated.

It is the task of human beings to articulate praise within creation in an act of thanksgiving for the beauty of the world and the self. The Eucharistic Prayer III of the Roman Rite reflects this when the priest proclaims 'all creation rightly gives you praise' (*Sacramentary*, 1985: 552). Ward points out, quoting Giakalis, that the records of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 CE declared that 'it is through me that the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 18:1), through me that the moon venerates God, through me that the water, rains, dews, and the whole creation venerate and glorify God' (2003: 44). Consequently, one of the most fundamental tasks of our humanity is to be 'the priests' of creation and become involved in an aesthetic response of praise which gives thanks for the beauty of God and its participation in all created things – to be instigators of a never-ending song of creation. Co-creation means, in this sense, praise and adoration, an act of worship offered to the Father.

The priest, argues Ward, is essentially the artist engaged in an anagogical act of surrender. Worship for St John is 'a token of subjection – that is, submission and humiliation' (Ward 2003: 46). The artist has the ability to see the form of God's glory and make it manifest to the world. Here begins a theological aesthetics interwoven with a theological phenomenology seeing all created matter as expressing divine grace and power. The artist is able to 'see' this – she recognizes that all creation must be received as divine gift, and that because of the Incarnation the relationship between the seen and the unseen is radically changed. What is significant here is that once this relationship is acknowledged then there are no disruptions, distances or obstacles to be negotiated. 'The idol has no existence, for all things, in God, exist iconically' (Ward 2003: 50).

Such priestly and artistic roles become central to the process of deification. St John himself was a poet and hymn writer, a dramatist and possibly a novelist. The process also involves a process of discipleship since our training and disciplining of desire for God prepares us for 'redemption, re-cognition, re-ception' (Ward 2003: 57). Pleasure gives way to *ascesis* as the Christian life becomes a new mode of being and living in the world. The artist–priest is responsible for making, for fashioning, for *poiesis*, and responsible for encouraging a lifestyle which has beauty as its foundation and core: 'Anagogy is the development of a lifestyle, an aesthetics of living in which to apprehend the beautiful is to become beautiful. One practises beauty in a movement of redemption from purification and illumination to glorification and doxology' (Ward 2003: 60).

I think Ward is right to suggest the process of developing a redemptive aesthetic mode of being attuned to the movement and disciplining of desire can come about through the appreciation of the icon and the image, as the eighth-century iconoclastic debate showed. The priestly endeavour will ultimately and naturally lead to praise and worship since the beauty we proclaim, recognize and develop in ourselves draws us into an act of humble adoration. Denys knew this, St Augustine also, but to some reserved extent, as I have indicated. There is no more fitting response than to fall on

our knees when the recognition of who we are and how this occurred takes place. The good news is nothing other than the redemption of the created order and our recognition that we are part of that redeeming plan. Nietzsche said that Christians never look as though they have been saved. This is one of the central failures of the history of Christianity – to un-recognize and forget who we are and what creation has become. Beauty must not be forgotten if this failure is to be reversed. And it might take the artist–priest, as Ward suggests, to remind us of this truth.

The Victorine Tradition

The Victorines were an order of Augustinian canons Regular founded around the Abbey of St Victor in the twelfth century and they continued to be a major theological and spiritual force within European Christianity until the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century broke their influence. They followed the *Rule of St Augustine*, which encouraged 'a spiritual ascent to that Beauty which is God, the Splendour of Truth. Generosity is the response to this beauty, which is reflected, in a true community of one heart and mind, in the one Christ after the model of the first Christians at Jerusalem' (quoted in Chase 2003: 25). Responsible for bringing the mystical theology of Denys into the West, they brought together theology, liturgy, exegesis, mysticism, aesthetics, ethics and contemplation into a natural synthesis.[3] Contemplating the presence of God in all things, they took a largely apophatic stance towards spiritual ascent, based on a firm belief in the symbolic as the avenue towards the incomprehensible mystery of God. The development of a sacramental cosmology in their writings and their encouragement to see all created things as being divinely interconnected resulted in an expression of faith rooted in symbolic representation. They believed that the symbolic imagination was crucial if Christianity was to flourish and to be lived in any substantial manner.

Deeply influenced by Denys's theology during the Middle Ages and his evocative definition of a symbol as a juxtaposition of a visible form brought forth to demonstrate some invisible matter, the symbolic mentality became pivotal to their understanding and appreciation of faith and Christianity as a whole. Symbols gave primary expression to those things which reason alone failed to understand or grasp. Chenu claims that during the Medieval period, especially in the twelfth century, an important linguistic and liturgical change took place – the use of metaphor was replaced by the use of the symbolic, primarily due to the influence of Denys (an emphasis which was unfortunately not to last). The anagogical potentiality of symbols was reinforced, constituted by their natural dynamism *as symbols*. As Chenu records

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3   What became crucial in the Victorines' approach was the integration of theology and spirituality. Doctrines were the result of mystical insight gained through liturgical participation and contemplative reading. *Lectio divina* played a crucial role in this. Hugh of St Victor, head of the Parisian school, opens his discourse on learning (*Didascalicon)* with the statement that of all things to be sought the first is wisdom. To read a spiritual text was to be engaged in the work of your own salvation. The selected readings were to be read slowly and meaningfully and if there was to be any interrogation, then it consisted of the interrogation of the self, as wisdom rather than information took hold in the heart.

about their nature, 'The image of the transcendent was not some pleasant addition to their natures; rather rooted in the "dissimilar similitudes" of the hierarchical ladder, it was their very reality and reason for being' (1968: 123). In other words, they served to express something of the divine without ever pretending to capture definitively the essence of the divine. The symbol always allowed mystery, indeed was *one with mystery*. This was no mere epistemological sign, but an indispensable vehicle for mystical experience and spiritual ascent; symbols encouraged believers to engage with them *and* go beyond them – mystery leading to further mystery. For example, to read the Bible unanagogically was literally to profane it and *lectio divina* was the method *par excellence* for entering into this mystery and for appreciating the beauty of God, which is why a slow, meditative reading was essential.

The most famous of the Augustinian canons was Hugh of St Victor (1096–1141). One of his important works was a *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, although his *magnum opus* was *On the Sacraments of the Christian Church*. The former is a treatise about symbols and how they operate to support the anagogical journey to God. What is required, suggests Hugh, is a contemplative seeing of the face of God through Christ in creation, humanity and beauty. The Incarnation enlightens all humanity so that they may see through the symbolic the invisible things of God. Both Hugh and Richard of St Victor focussed on this anagogic use of symbols. A symbol is 'a collection of visible forms for the demonstration of invisible things' (quoted in Chase 2003: 107). Richard of St Victor in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse of God* demonstrates how sensible symbols assist in the movement towards divine realities. Victorine spirituality, therefore, emphasizes that it is through contemplative seeing that the symbolic can become the vehicle towards the divine. Chase suggests that for the Victorines 'mystical theology is that "art" by which we are led from the Easter quality of "lumpy cemetery mud" to the "foolish wisdom" of Easter itself' (2003: 109).

Painted on the Heart

Symbolic theology, therefore, became the heart of Victorine spirituality. Hugh wrote two treatises using the figure of Noah's ark to symbolize the Church as a place of refuge and safety from the distractions of the temporal world. The Church is the Ark whereby her members are assisted on their journey to God. But what is unique about the Victorines is their emphasis not simply on the symbolic and anagogical use of liturgy and Scripture, but their ability to transform the spiritual ascent into a concrete visual paradigm. In the case of Hugh and Richard actual diagrams were constructed to function as visual analogues of written exegesis. As part of their monastic practice, such illustrations were then intended to be contemplatively 'painted' on the heart and mind, so that they could become a meditative icon of ascent, a method we will encounter in my later discussion of St John Cassian's *Conferences* (Chapter 3). The drawings became a *manuductio* (a guiding hand) for the contemplation of invisible things (Chase 2003: 72–3). Through such textually-based drawings, *meditatio* and *contemplatio*, the bases of *lectio*, were taught. Spiritual eyes for Hugh (which consisted of the eyes of the flesh, of reason or mind and of contemplation) were able to 'see' clearly the divine image which grounds the soul. The iconographic,

therefore, was never inferior to the written form. In many ways, the visual was more effective since it provided a unity that spoken and fragmented words were not able to offer, a theme I shall pursue in Chapter 3.

What is significant about this process is its use of the visible in stimulating a movement into the heart of the person, thereby inscribing a reflection of that visibility within the soul itself, enabling as a consequence, an intimate experience of the divine to take place. The Victorine movement towards the divine therefore, assisted by concrete visual forms, produced an internalized and profound sense of God. As Chase comments, 'the church, the ark, and the tabernacle are to be "built" within the human soul so that God may dwell there' (2003: 74). For example, in *The Mystical Ark* Richard explains the contemplative approach to God symbolized in the ark of the covenant described in Exodus 24. The ark of sanctification means the 'grace of contemplation'. Richard asks, 'Do you not see how rightly the ark of the covenant, in and by which such grace is symbolically expressed, is said to be "of the Lord"?' (1979: 153).

Richard describes in Book 1 of *The Mystical Ark*, six kinds of contemplation of the objects which may be used, involving reason, imagination and understanding. The first is rooted in imagination and according to imagination only. The second is in imagination and according to reason. The third is in reason and according to imagination. The fourth is in reason and according to reason. The fifth is above but not beyond reason. The sixth is above reason and seems to be beyond reason. There are, therefore, two in imagination, two in reason and two in understanding.

The materials which make up the ark are symbolic of these levels: wood represents knowledge derived from the senses, the imaginative faculty, gold stands for reason, and the purest of gold (the mercy seat and the seraphim), refers to understanding. Each of the four stages in building the ark stands for the first four kinds of contemplation. Besides these elements, Richard names other dimensions: for example, the full cubit measure indicating fullness of knowledge and the half-cubic measure partial knowledge. The seraphim symbolize the last two levels of contemplation since the gold used has to be beaten and shaped like the higher levels of contemplation; their wings represent their flight upwards towards heaven.

Throughout the text he refers to objects of contemplation at every level as *spectaculum* or 'manifestation'. In Books 2 to 4, Richard wishes to make a distinction between those contemplatives who need material objects to assist their ascent to God and those who are able to see directly without any veil and to rest in the divine presence unaided. For example, the opening of Book 2 consists of an account of level one, those who 'wonder at corporeal things with respect to all those things which enter into the soul by means of the five bodily senses … and … is indicated in this description of the ark by the joining together of pieces of wood' (1979: 174).

In the third level of contemplation,

> in order that it may rise to invisible things, supports itself with the staff of a corporeal similitude and lifts itself up to high things by means of a ladder … such speculation is indicated by the crown of the ark that is fastened in the lower part to pieces of wood but in the upper part rises above the extent of the wood. (1979: 190)

At this level, a person learns 'to be made a spiritual being, because now he should begin to bring together spiritual things and to be formed in the novitiate of his senses, as he endeavours more and more each day to taste those things which are above, not those which are upon the earth' (1979: 190). This third type of contemplation entails a combination of reason and imagination and the person comes to know invisible spiritual realities through the use of similitudes drawn from the material world. This world, therefore, provides a guiding hand (*manuductio*) in the ascent to spiritual truth, primarily through the operation of the imagination. Richard writes: 'For reason would never rise up to the contemplation of invisible things unless the imagination, by means of representing the form of visible things, were to show from what it should draw a similitude to those things and form the mode of its investigation' (1979: 27). The mode of investigation is dependent on the concrete and the material and the use of the imagination.

The fourth stage in Richard's hierarchy of contemplation is noticeably different from the first three. Here the focus of meditation is the soul, as the gaze moves entirely inwards and explores the hidden depths of the self. The soul is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Using musical imagery Richard tells us of the way in which a person is formed by grace until 'a certain melody, mellifluous and sweet beyond measure, resounds from them into the ears of the Lord Saboath …' (1979: 257). This sound then joins with the multitude of the angelic host as they exult and praise God. Book 4 describes the ecstatic vision of God, and like Moses it is possible to sleep in the peace of God. Forgetful of the ego 'he who sleeps does not know those things which are around him – indeed he does not even know himself' (1979: 303).

Richard uses the ark and the two seraphim as a symbol for this graded contemplation. The seraphim accompany the ark in the innermost chamber of the tabernacle of the covenant. The tabernacle was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, symbolizing for him the presence of God towards which we all journey. There were four stages in building the ark: 1) the making of the frame from pieces of Setim wood; 2) the gilding of the wooden ark; 3) the making of a crown of pure gold; 4) the making of a propitiatory or mercy seat out of pure gold providing a cover for the ark. The seraphim are gold, six-winged creatures, the apex of the angelic hierarchy, closest to God.
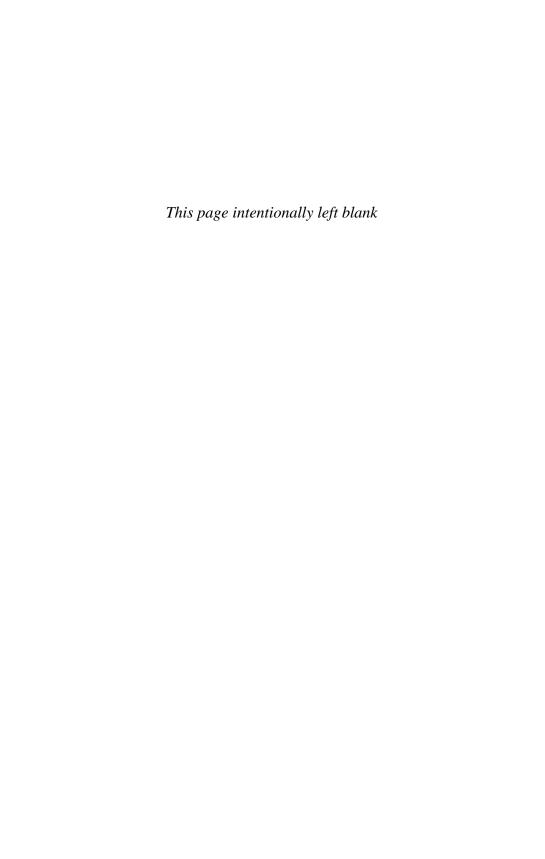
Further analogies follow: the enlargement of the mind is related to the building of the ark, the raising up of the mind compared to the ark lifted and carried behind the cloud of divine presence, ecstasy is symbolized by the ark cutting through a veil in the holy of holies. Richard asks what it entails when a person approaches the interior tabernacle or the peak of the mountain. He says, 'For when we are carried away either above or within ourselves by ecstasy of mind, in contemplation of divine things, we immediately forget all exterior things – nay not only those which are outside us but also those which are in us' (1979: 306). The description entails an outer journey of ascent towards a transcendent other and an interior journey within.

Richard also uses the image of the hovering of birds to represent the human quest for God – we hover contemplatively in our hearts as we search for God; there is stillness in motion. Rest and movement operate dialectically as the soul finds its path to God. In *The Mystical Ark* Richard finds a concrete way of expressing the story in Exodus 24. He uses the two cherubim on the summit of the ark to represent

a paradox: one symbolizes divine unity and Oneness and the other diversity. Both are necessary to understand the divine presence.

What I have attempted to outline in this chapter is that the apophatic mysticism of Denys, which located liturgical and biblical symbolism at its centre, encouraged an ascent to the divine to take place. The material symbolism of liturgical practice produced an anagogical movement of desire which lifted the soul beyond the visible towards 'another place', inexpressibly beautiful and good. There could be no going beyond without an encounter with the symbolic and material. I then argued that the iconoclastic debate of the eighth century became central for understanding the nature of the Christian faith since it persuaded figures like St John of Damascus to defend the ineffable mystery of God which could be legitimately imaged in the figure of the Son. Denys's emphasis on the importance of symbolic theology allowed him to defend concrete representations of the divine, which encouraged contemplation on the One who is beyond all representations. This in turn, was reflected in the Victorines' emphasis on the concrete and symbolic as a means of internalizing the central themes of liturgy and Scripture, which brought together the interior movement of the self with an ascent to the beyond. Their graphic designs were constructed both outside and inside the self – they were painted on the heart. This process of internalizing the central mysteries of the Christian faith was initiated by the strength of the Victorines' symbolic mentality secured within the Church's liturgy in which they participated daily.

In the next chapter I extend this theme by examining how significant theological voices have outlined this movement towards divine mystery as an unveiling of the Christian God within the self. This discussion enables me to suggest later that the liturgy of the twenty-first century will have to take serious account of this movement if it is to perform its task well.

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Chapter 2

The Movement of Interiority

The paradoxical movement which St Augustine explores in his spiritual theology about the greatest moments of transcendence as being simultaneously the deepest experiences of intimacy is the theme I trace in this chapter, a theme liturgy has the task of encouraging. I also wish to contrast his understanding of creation's participation in divine beauty with Denys's notion of emanation and suggest that the latter is a better theological foundation on which to build the liturgy of the future. For St Augustine and later contemplative writers, the source of our own identity, of who we really are and who we might become, is inseparable from the experience of both transcendent and interior beauty. He grows to love this God of Beauty, even if this was for him a late recognition in his life: 'Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you' he writes (1977: 10.231).

St Augustine's understanding of God in his *Confessions* is that this beauty was both internal and external: 'Yet, you were deeper than my inmost understanding and higher than the topmost height that I could reach' (*Tu autem Domine, eras interior meo et superior summon meo*) (1977: 10.63). His experience at Ostia, a year after his conversion, bears witness in a language reminiscent of Plotinus, to a movement towards God who is both unknown and outside the self and yet perceptible to the heart with an overwhelming immediacy. For St Augustine, therefore, an approach to God is as personal as it is transcendently distant – the most intimate is always the most impenetrable. Ascent to God and the descent into the heart are coterminous. Just as Moses ascended and penetrated the darkness where God resided, humanity's spiritual ascent too, consists of a movement into the depths of the self. Throughout St Augustine's writings, therefore, the metaphors of inwardness and externality combine to produce St Augustine's distinctive theory of divine knowledge (Turner 1995: 53–4).

Contemplative prayer, liturgical experience and God's grace allow this perception of God to occur, for it is an experience of a new identity in Christ. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton, in his account of contemplation refers to St Augustine,

> The experience of contemplation is the experience of God's life and presence within ourselves not as an object, but as the source of our own subjectivity. Contemplation is a mystery in which God reveals Himself to us as the centre of our most intimate self – *Interior intimo meo* as St Augustine said. When the realisation of His presence bursts upon us, our own self disappears in Him, and we pass through the red sea of separation to lose ourselves and find our true selves in Him. (Quoted in Shannon et al. 2002: 83)[1]

1   Other contemplative spiritual writers have drawn attention to this kind of attachment to God within the depths of the self or heart. The Cistercian writer Howe suggests, 'one could say that our ontological attachment to God, at the level of the heart, will transform the image

The Russian Orthodox writer Evdokimov extends this idea with particular reference to the liturgy in his *Ages of the Spiritual Life*, suggesting that liturgical dialogue begins with the recognition and acceptance of the internal gift of God's presence. An internal Christic reality precedes any religious experience. Drawing from St Paul he recalls that Christ is in each person and consequently, 'This reality interiorises religious experience to the point of divine intimacy' (1998: 59). God, in being radically interior, cannot be made an object. Conversely, when there occurs a loss of a sense of *imago Dei* in humanity, the world becomes obsessed with self-absorption, 'self-worship ... In the long run our sad utopias risk modifying our anthropological type. We lose our dimension of depth' (1998: 91).

What liturgy has the potential to evoke – in its expression of the wholly Other experienced as the intimately personal – is also well captured by Otto in his influential writing on the experience of the holy. He refers to a feeling of '*mysterium tremendum*' (1982: 12) in his examination of the non-rational and rational factors in experiencing the divine (1982: 1–4). His account of these emotions, often experienced in the 'fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and solemnities' (1982: 12) centre on the experience of 'tremor', best understood in relation to the Hebrew word *hiqdish* (hallow) meaning 'to mark it off by a feeling of peculiar dread, not to be mistaken for any ordinary dread, that is to appraise it by the category of the numinous (1982: 13), akin to when Job uses the word, 'let not thy dread make me afraid' (1982: 14). It entails a sense of mystery in relation to that which is hidden and secret. Otto writes, 'Conceptually *mysterium* denotes merely that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar ... But though what is enunciated in the word is negative, what is meant is something absolutely positive' (1982: 13).

This experience of awe brings about an intimate response to the sacred, evoking the words 'Holy, Holy, Holy' whereby the 'shudder' of primitive religions loses its 'crazy and bewildering note' (Otto 1982: 17), becoming transmuted into mystical awe which reflects a feeling creature-consciousness. For Otto such mystical experiences are rooted in an apophatic domain. Not only is religion not content with contrasting God to all that is of nature or of this world, but it is 'absolutely and intrinsically other than and opposite of everything that is and can be thought' (1982: 29). The only manner in which conceptual thought can 'say' something of this experience is by using the term 'wholly other'. But allied to this is the liturgical experience of encountering something uniquely fascinating, attractive and compelling. Feelings of longing and moments of 'fascination' are felt, which consist of a 'propulsion' towards an ideal good and a feeling of inexpressible tranquillity. Rest and movement are characteristic of this dynamic (a theme I shall explore in Chapter 4 in my account of Gregory of Nyssa) and liturgical symbols play an indispensable part in this disclosure. The mind comes to know this Wholly Other 'in its yearning' recognizing

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of God that we are into the likeness of God that we were born to be. This is the growth of spiritual being' (Howe 2005: 6). See also Jamison, who comments that the 'interior life is one of the places where God will manifest his presence but the presence of God in the soul is not the same as divinising desires. People cannot simply assert their true self; they need to pray for the strength to find that self beyond their desires' (2006: 88).

it for what it is 'behind the obscure and inadequate symbols which are its only expression' (Otto 1982: 36).

'Christ who Lives in Me'

The realization of who we are becomes possible through the Incarnation. Christ is the meeting point *par excellence* between the apophatic and the cataphatic. This identification of the self with Christ is characteristic of St Paul's Christology as a whole. If Christ is the perfect image of the Father, then he is our access to the Father, and being the mediator between God and humanity, is the means by which we are sanctified and made into His image. In finding Christ, St Paul argues, a person finds herself. The old self is replaced and through baptism, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20). 'Christ is the image of the invisible God' (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) and for those who have been baptized, they too will 'bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor. 3:9–10). As we see 'the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror' we shall be 'transformed into the self-same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3:18). This transformation of human beings into God's image through Christ is central to Paul's theology and expectations (Young 1996: 52). Vatican Council II's Roman Catholic document on liturgy, *Sacrasanctum Concilium*, similarly states that baptism grafts humanity into the paschal mystery of Christ (*Sacrasanctum Concilium* 1.6, in Flannery 1992: 46). *Lumen Gentium* also attempts to express this same idea: 'All members must be formed in his likeness, until Christ be formed in them (cf. Gal. 4:19)'. They must then 'hold on to and perfect in their lives that sanctification which they have received from God' (*Lumen Gentium* 5.40, in Flannery 1992: 46). It is primarily in worship that Christ begins to form humanity into his image. According to Gregory of Nyssa, the Christian life entails a movement towards becoming an image of the invisible God:

> just as when we are learning the art of painting, the teacher puts before us on a panel a beautifully executed model, and it is necessary for each student to imitate in every way the beauty of that model on his own panel … one must prepare the pure colours of the virtues, mixing them with some artistic formula for the imitation of beauty, so that we become an image of the image, having achieved the beauty of the Prototype through activity as a kind of imitation, as Paul did, who became an 'imitator of Christ'. (Quoted in Thiessen 2004: 40)

Re-activating the memory towards this self-realization becomes a movement of the will and the stirring of the heart. It is a realization of the beauty of the self in Christ. St John of the Cross reiterates this at the end of the poem *The Spiritual Canticle*, 'Let us rejoice, beloved, / And let us go forth / To behold ourselves in your beauty' (1987: 274.36.1). And in his commentary alongside he writes, 'wherefore I shall be you in your beauty, and you will be me in my beauty, because your beauty will be my beauty; and therefore we shall behold each other in your beauty' (1987: 275.37.1). And yet, when it comes to St Augustine, I shall show that there lies an ambiguity about the full acceptance of the beauty of the self and the world which has had a

considerable influence on theological and liturgical thinking. If Denys's liturgical influence had lasted a different story might have unfolded.

I now examine four theological figures who have paid particular attention to this movement of interiority and transformation – St Augustine, St Aelred of Rievaulx, William of St Thierry and St Teresa of Avila. I delineate how the recognition of the divine within the interior movements of the heart (which might be called a process of deification) rests on the realization that we are made in the image of God, the God of beauty. I argue later in Chapter 4 how the Church's liturgical performances and contexts of beauty have the potential to bring to memory and sustain this identity as *imago Dei*, the self realized as God's image. Beauty, I argue, shapes the divine self that is humanity (Pope John Paul II 1999: 1).

Interiority and Transcendence: St Augustine

In St Augustine we find an emphasis on a God who desires to reveal not only Himself, but who *we are* in relation to Him. Driven by *eros*, God unveils Himself in the core of our being, the centre of the heart. It is difficult to find anywhere else in Christian writing such a passionate enthusiasm for an identification of God as both the transcendent Other *and* the depths of the self. God is the ontological basis of each person's identity and the summit of happiness to which they aspire. Consequently, the metaphors of inwardness and transcendence interact quite naturally in St Augustine, there being no conflict between them. At this place of meeting, time interacts with eternity (Turner 1995: 99) and somewhat paradoxically, the greatest depth of intimacy with God becomes simultaneously the moment of greatest transcendence, an encounter St Augustine calls *acies mentis*.

The classical definition of the attributes of God is for St Augustine personal and intimate. God is omnipresent because he is always personally present to St Augustine, even when he was not aware of it (Martin Soskice 2002: 72). This understanding combines a philosophical and biblical approach. As Martin Soskice comments,

> The God of the attributes is not far away but near, very near – and so Augustine is able to mix, willy nilly, and without embarrassment, the language of the divine perfection with the language of the psalms and gospels because all are terms of God's intimacy with us. (2002: 72)

For St Augustine, 'ultimacy and intimacy are one' (Martin Soskice 2002: 73). The inward journey is the path to truth: '*noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas*' (Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward person dwells truth), writes St Augustine (quoted in Taylor 1992: 129). The light of God is not simply a transcendent one, but a light within, an inner light. It is the light which St John speaks about in the fourth gospel as being the 'light which enlightens all men' (John 1:9) and such inner light enables us to know and perceive things as they really are. Taylor goes as far as to suggest that St Augustine introduced and bequeathed to Western culture 'the inwardness of radical reflexivity' (1992: 131). But this distinctive legacy was rooted in identifying the move inwards as the move towards God. God is not only to be found in the created order therefore, but in the very

depths of the person, what Taylor refers to as 'the intimacy of self-presence' (1992: 134). Indeed, St Augustine's understanding and proof of God rests on a personal and reflective knowing and reasoning. It discerns God's incorporeal light and then comes to know and judge rightly all things. In reflection, humanity acknowledges something higher than its own reason to which it ought to give homage and gratitude. Taylor puts it nicely, 'The experience of being illuminated from another source, of receiving the standards of our reason from beyond ourselves, which the proof of God's existence already brought to light, is seen to be very much an experience of inwardness' (1992: 135).

A Strange Forgetting

Consequently, for St Augustine, to be who we are, to know who we are and to be happy with whom we are, entails a remembering (*anamnesis*), a ceaseless recalling of the self back to its identity and place. In Book 10 St Augustine considers the force of his memory,

> my memory also contains my feelings, not in the same way as they are present to the mind when it experiences them, but in a quite different way that is in keeping with the special powers of the memory. For even when I am unhappy I can remember times when I was cheerful, and when I am cheerful I can remember past unhappiness. (1997: 10.14)

The images which come into the memory serve an important function giving a person an innate knowledge of God which has to be actualized and made explicit and which serves as a driving force towards its realization (Bell 1984: 26). The encouragement to remember and be mindful is characteristic of the Hebrew Bible and, in particular, the book which every monk in the Middle Ages learnt by heart – the Book of Psalms. A key text was Psalm 136: 'By the waters of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept when we *remembered* Zion'. Early commentaries allegorized Zion as the Heavenly City of the New Jerusalem, and spoke of those exiled by the rivers of the devil's city, Babylon, but in expectation of their heavenly return. Such remembering is a natural rediscovery that God is at the depth of our being; our exile is over once we accept this recognition.

In his *Confessions*, St Augustine recalls his former disappointing days: 'You were within me and I was within the world outside myself' (1977: 10.27). It is too easy (as St Augustine himself acknowledges in his pre-conversion days), to be caught up in the 'lovely things of your creation' without knowing that they are 'yours' (God's) since it is tempting to live in the world outside the self, little acknowledging that God is *in the self* all the time: 'You were with me, and I was not with you' writes St Augustine in his *Confessions*. It was only 'of late' that St Augustine came to love the God within, for he had searched for too long 'outside' himself (1977: 10.27). He had looked for God among mutable things, among the 'images of the material things' (1977: 10.25), where He could never be found. But when he did find the lost coin for which he had been searching – the light which shines within him – he sensed that it was accompanied by emotions of love and terror, as he realized his difference from, and yet most intimate relationship to, the goal of his desire: 'With terror inasmuch as

I am utterly other than it, with burning love in that I am akin to it' (quoted in Eagleton 2003: 161). This feeling of love and terror remains with St Augustine throughout his life and accounts for his attitude to his own sinful nature, which he believed was prone to tempt him away from the God he had found. But St Augustine knows that his finding of God is crucial for his self-fulfilment and self-esteem, since only the one who loves God knows how to love. In this appearing of God's light the true self emerges, the initiative always being with God's love breaking in.

The *Confessions* therefore relate a biographical narrative self-discovery, a personal testimony about true happiness and an exploration about where ultimate rest may be found. The happiness that St Augustine finally comes to know is rooted in God's desire for him and his desire for God. The restless, human search for happiness is always, in some measure, a reciprocal search for God whereby all longings for happiness entail a quest for the divine (whether consciously known or not): 'Happiness is to rejoice in you and for you and because of you. This is true happiness and there is no other' (1977: 10.22). St Augustine acknowledges that conversion is not an end to human aspiration and struggle. The heart is constantly moving to that place where it can find ultimate rest and along the way the emotional life unleashes itself towards what it now knows is the only satisfactory object of desire (Williams 1990: 76). The movement of the heart always continues, itself desirous and restless in its search for God and the self.

The search is unending because God is insatiable satiety and because the mind finds itself incomprehensible to itself in such a venture. There is always more to know and understand. But to undertake this journey into unfathomable love is to progress along the spiritual path and his *Confessions* highlight this recognition that a person's ultimate destiny is to live in communion with God, without whom she will never find happiness. He believes that when he is completely united to God and entirely full of Him, only then will his life be complete. Those who look towards material things (which can never make them happy), allow their noise to dim the memory of this truth. There can be no resting in the Light until a person dies to this world. Even things of beauty in the world are mutable and corruptible and 'would not exist at all unless they came from you. Like the sun they rise and set' (1977: 4.10). His previous mistake was to worship 'the god of my own delusion', but 'if I tried to find in it a place to rest my burden, there was nothing there to uphold it' (1977: 4.7). The way forward is always through a continual search towards that which is immutable and immortal. Those who live with dim recollections of God must never give up in their quest, but search on 'for fear that darkness may engulf' (1977: 10.23), since human fulfilment and rest cannot be found apart from God. A person must extricate himself from the love of the material world, i.e., temporal things, since it is fatal to put one's trust in things which are transitory and changeable.

Consequently, St Augustine's discovery and notion of divine knowledge is not envisaged as a substance or a possession of the soul to be grasped or clung to. It is more like a movement of the restless heart, ceaselessly being spurred on, displaced and exceeded by an unrelenting search and desire of and for God. It is better to describe it in terms of a longing, a future, a hope, a continuous journey of conversion and re-conversion, an experience of constant movement and growth. It is an encounter with light, a light which enfolds. St Augustine's *imago Dei* is the

experience of always being open to the infinity of God, of being changed by its light, and of moving in its rays. As Hart writes, 'Thus, within himself St Augustine finds no place to stand, nor does he glimpse above him a higher self … but he does see a light that embraces him as it shapes him …' (2003: 114). This is an experience the liturgy of the Church must encourage and sustain.

The search for God results in a person remembering the God who is changeless and desirous of our transformation. For St Augustine, the longing is a restless searching beyond this world. The beauties of the world move us out of the controlling power of the intellect but always point away from themselves towards the One who is absolute Beauty (Williams 1990: 78–9). In *Confessions* he explains that the higher or eternal Beauty of God, which never changes, is the One to be desired in the pursuit of happiness. He realizes this truth at the core his memory and as an act of discernment, of realizing that God's presence is both within and without and stands above those things which are mutable. God is absolute truth, a truth which is changeless and present everywhere: 'You are truth and you are everywhere present where all seek counsel of You' (1977: 23). Happiness can only be found in an unchangeable Truth and Beauty, not among the 'material things' which, although they may be beautiful, in a certain way, can never be the ultimate source of our happiness. Since by nature, they are mutable and temporary, they cannot bestow enduring happiness. They both compare and contrast with eternal Beauty which is different – it never changes, it is light not bound by space, sound which never fades away, an embrace which is never severed by fulfilment or desire: 'This is what I love when I love my God' (1977: 10.6), writes St Augustine. He gradually began to distance himself from Manichaean anthropology, to which he had previously been attracted, and had learned from St Ambrose that those Genesis verses which referred to man made in the image of God pointed to a person's inner identity, one endowed with reason and intellect (Lancel 2002: 134–5). God's image had been disfigured after the Fall and the tunics of hide (Gen. 3:21), which represented humanity's fallen, animal-like nature after the committing of sin, began to cover up the beauty of the self. The task of those living after the Fall is to restore the lost image of beauty, to regain the paradise once offered as a gift of love, to work so that we might earn rest on the seventh day (Lancel 2002: 135).

Contemplation of the created order can turn into a stairway to the immortal if it is seen with the right eyes. The spiritual seeing of God in creation does not come easily, however. According to the *Soliloquies*, a person must progress in his love of God and the moral life in order to prefer Him to all things and to see with spiritual eyes the God-given beauty of the world. This entails a striking transition from one way of seeing to another. What St Augustine tells us is that the path from the old to the new is not a slight reappraisal of the world but a decisive journey into a new kingdom. This Kingdom of God has existed since Abel and from the time of Christ it has moved out of the shadows into the light and is a radically new world wrenched from the old and, for some, even in the Church, who still behave according to the flesh, it remains largely veiled.

The recognition of our pre-fallen nature is associated with the Neoplatonic idea that all knowing is a kind of recognition (Turner 1995: 58). Like the woman who went in search of the lost coin, St Augustine tells us that we must seek that which

has been lost, but in order to find it we must *remember that we have forgotten*, and recognize that something is missing, something has gone astray and is not right. But it is never an irrevocable forgetting since, 'If we had completely forgotten it, we should not even be able to look for what was lost' (1977: 10.19). Remembering *who we are* calls for a revivifying of a faint memory, a constant struggle not to forget again, a courageous and active disposition of the will which never allows the self to slip back (for St Augustine recalls all too well his earlier days) into the acceptance of a life and longing which falls short of what he has come to know is the only real search and goal of life. The challenge is not to allow himself to re-erect the barriers of deafness and blindness which had been so strong and damaging in the first place (1977: 10.27). At his conversion, God 'broke the barrier of deafness'. God's light shone upon him: 'your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight ... You touched me and I am inflamed with love of your peace' (1977: 10.27).

He constantly records in the *Confessions* how the spectre of his former life still lingers and haunts him. As a rhetorician, he wants to be able to find the right words which may speak of God in non-idolatrous ways and he discovers the answer through prayer: 'Speak to me so that I may hear' he prays. St Augustine recognizes that he can only speak of God if God first speaks to him, just as He spoke to Moses and Israel (Martin Soskice 2002: 74). But, in his memory, particularly during his sleep, images of former things recur which, due to their temporal and attractive appeal, shift the self in the wrong direction towards those things which are temporal and merely mortal. As Clack comments, 'What drives Augustine's theology/anthropology is less a hatred of pleasure, and more a desire to avoid the loss (and resulting pain) of valuing temporal, sensual things' (2002: 23). She explains,

> The loss of control over unruly flesh leads Augustine to conclude that fallen human existence will be defined by conflict within the self. Both sex and death affect the loss of the image of God, which he locates in the mind. What is sinful is not the body but the will that disobeys God. (Clack 2002: 30)

He is reassured, however, that although he grieves for his weaknesses and deficiencies, God's gifts will strengthen him: 'With awe in my heart I rejoice in your gifts … trusting that you will perfect your mercies in me until I reach the fullness of peace, which I will enjoy with you in soul and body…' (1977: 10.30). He also has the words of St Paul to rely on: 'Nothing is beyond my powers thanks to the strength God gives me' (1977: 10.31). But while these are words of faith they are also warnings to himself not to forget again who he really is. The entire argument of *de Trinitate* is based upon an answer to who we really are – we are made in the image of God, of the Trinity. Williams suggests, 'Before ever God can be spoken of, the heart must 'imagine' or 'figure' him, and 'recognize' him as its resting place;' (1990: 77) and this involves a contemplative turning towards the object of desire.

Within this account of human happiness, sin becomes the wilful self-exiling of the self, the proud and boastful incapacity to realize who we actually are, to live forgetfully and to ignore the image of the Trinity that makes us who we are. In other words, to be estranged from the God who resides within the depth of our being. St Augustine's definition of sin, therefore, is an experience of estrangement from

ourselves and Christians are those who seek re-integration. The goal is to reach that realm where God lives, where there is no confusion or discord, only harmony and unity. Religion means binding oneself to this unity, to this indivisible harmony. The discord of the world is nothing substantial in itself, since it has no origin in God, but it is alienation (*abalienatio*), estrangement from the source and the light.

Clack reminds us that many twentieth-century existentialists in their search for an authentic existence, adapted the emptiness of the self to a series of choices in the hope that a 'new' self might be gained. But the construction of meaning at the root of such attempts postulated individual, this-worldly 'transcendence', based on rational and brave choices to stand out from the world. As she comments about Sartre's philosophy, 'The human enterprise is to create meaning, to explore with wonder the world in which we find ourselves' (2002: 45). We are not made in the image of God but simply reflect the image we make of ourselves. Clack quotes from Sartre's philosophy: 'man will be what he will have planned to be' (quoted in Clack 2002; 40). In contrast, St Augustine's notion of interiority is far removed from an individual, existential search for meaning and centres on a ceaseless interior search for the God who is within.

To discover what lies at the depth of the self, however, is not simply a personal unaided effort of the will. God does not leave us alone to discover His presence. If God is *interior intimo meo* (deeper than my deepest self), then a new way of 'seeing' assisted by God's grace is needed to acknowledge this truth. The mind requires *illuminatio*. St Augustine's theology of grace centres on this notion of divine assistance, which is able to raise fallen humanity to the divine life by the Light itself: 'Of himself, man can by no means raise himself from earthly life to attain the vision of God,' acknowledges von Balthasar in his critique of St Augustine (1995: 111). The striving for the truth is always guided by Christ Himself, who is the wisdom and grace of God. Living 'in Christ' means treading the path by means of the Light. The Pelagian controversy is an argument about living and moving 'in Christ' and humanity's dependency on this gift.

Ambiguity about Beauty in St Augustine

Platonism provided St Augustine with the encouragement to discover the interior God and to look within his soul with the 'eyes of his mind', and the Old Testament gave him the God of Moses, that immutable Light, the eternal Truth which transcends the mind, a Being also expressed in the intimate 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14). The transcendent One who cannot be expressed becomes the One who resides intimately in the heart. Unlike the God of the Manichaeans, who was subject to attack and violation from two independent divine substances in conflict with one another, St Augustine's God is immutable and incorruptible. He is Being itself, the one harmonious source of everything which exists in the created order. St Augustine's God, therefore, is both creator and sustainer, and everything which exists is dependent upon this source of all being. Nothing exists which is distinct from and independent of God.

After his conversion, as I have indicated, St Augustine believed that those 'beautiful things of this world' although they owe their existence to God (since they have their being in God and nothing exists apart from His being), at the same

time tempt him away from God: 'The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all' (1977: 10.27). Here we encounter in St Augustine an ambiguity about the presence of beauty in the world and the self which influenced much later theological thinking about beauty, displacing it from the central position it might have enjoyed. Although he was immensely interested in beauty during his entire life and indeed called God 'Beauty', he believed that created beauty could act as a snare and temptation rather than as a definitive ladder to its divine source. He writes about the beauty of the natural world in the last book of *The City of God* and in the *Confessions*, but in both accounts there is a double-edged understanding since beauty, although attractive, belongs to the world of mutability and mortality. As a result, he cannot fully believe that when he experiences such beauty he actually experiences God. As Jantzen comments, 'Even though the world and all that is in it is so beautiful that it seems 'as though nothing more beautiful could be found' it is in fact infested with 'worm and mice'; it is corruptible and mortal' (2002: 435). The natural world therefore often becomes 'spiritualized' in St Augustine and its full-bodied reality, which engages the flesh, is invariably considered a potential temptation away from God, rather than a firm path towards Him. St Augustine would have been dismayed to read of Denys's later confident theology of emanation of divine beauty. He was far too cautious for this and always believed the Creator to be immaterial and never fully embodied in the world. As Jantzen comments, 'Even though Augustine recognises God as the source of beauty, his metaphors remain negative and acutely defensive: the world's beauty is a 'snare' or a 'trap', not a path, mirror or a model' (Jantzen 2002: 437).

For St Augustine, God is a 'simple' Entity and immortal, the world composite and pluriform and corruptible. Consequently, there is always a contrast and dissimilarity between God and the world while at the same time the beauty of the created order offers a manifestation of His presence. Whenever we experience something of the beauty of the world we experience a manifestation of the God of Beauty and Truth. In this St Augustine is sensitive to an apophatic approach towards the divine and although Bell is accurate to claim that to experience the beauty of the world is to experience the 'reality behind the manifestation' (1984: 52), there is a significant difference between St Augustine and Denys. Many theologians, including von Balthasar, fail to recognize this *ambivalence* with which St Augustine speaks about beauty in the created order. Creation does reflect something of the divine but God is never embodied and wholly identified with creation as in Denys's theology of beauty and divine emanation, for God remains, as in Plato, immaterial and simple. Even when St Augustine comments about one revelatory moment in the natural world, 'Then, at last, I caught sight of your invisible nature, as it is known through your creatures' (1977: 7.17) we know that he is at the same time acutely aware that there is a tempting sensuousness about its presence which might lead him back into trouble and to his former life. St Augustine is too Platonist in his understanding to allow God to be embodied in creation since material things due to their corruptibility must always be viewed as deceptive shadows of the real. Plotinus and Denys did not have this reserve about the beauty of material things since all things which exist have a share in the one source of Beauty and its perfection and the excess of divine beauty

which flows into the created order is the means of humanity's return to the source. There is no ambiguity here.

Having acknowledged this, St Augustine does not simply reproduce Platonism in his theological vision, but proceeds by way of a doctrine of 'participation' rather than 'emanation' – a thing is what it is by virtue of its participation in being. His emphasis on creation (not emanation, which always suggests that a person is of the same nature as the Ultimate) reflects this. He writes in *De Civitate Dei* (12.2) that 'For since God is Supreme *Essentia*, that is, since he is in the highest sense, and is therefore immutable; he gave *esse* to the things which he created out of nothing, but not *esse* in the highest sense as he is' (quoted in Bell 1984: 24). We are who we are by our direct contact with Him and because we participate in God through His divine illumination we are able by *memoria* to experience His light within us. But we can never be identical with God even though He is the most intimate part of our nature. For St Augustine *memoria* became a theory of divine illumination and to know truth is to remember the presence of the divine light within us. It acts as a driving force to make explicit this latent source of light (Bell 1984: 25–6) and this divine light illumines our search for His Truth and His holiness. As we draw nearer to God we do become more like Him, but it is only in the resurrected body that we have the perfection of likeness and participation. During this life, where the body is corruptible, humanity will never assume the likeness of the immutable God of absolute Beauty. All creation, too, participates in *esse* and therefore reflects a trace of God. Such created traces are *vestigia Trinitatis*, just as humanity has the *imago Trinitatis*. But throughout St Augustine's writings there is always an encouragement is seek the incorruptible Good and the Beautiful beyond all the good and beautiful manifestations in the created order; indeed, anything which participates in such Ideas leads to the Logos and allows a glimpse of the divine nature. As Bell puts it, 'In other words, seek the reality behind the manifestation and since God is the Good of all good, the Truth of all truth, the Beauty of all beauties … anything which participates in such ideas acts as a starting point for the contemplative ascent to the Idea behind it …' (1984: 52).

Of course, for St Augustine, the image of God always remains, even though likeness is prevented by sin. This thorny question of image and likeness in St Augustine is centred around the notion that the image is a person's participation in *intelligere*, his God-endowed rationality indicating he has been made *ad imaginem Dei – to* the image of God. As Bell comments, however,

> The proposition *ad* (to), in the statement that man was created *ad imaginem Dei* indicates not only that man is not the true image (which is Christ), but also that he has a natural tendency, a *pondus*, to become more and more like the True Image, and thus more and more like God. (1984: 37–8)

Because a person is made *ad imaginem Dei* and *ad imaginem Trinitatis*, something of the nature of God and the Trinity is revealed in us and likeness to God means the degree of participation we are able to achieve as we progress spiritually. The Augustinian notion of image always contains within itself the idea of likeness. Reason is an important part of the soul and the means whereby it is able to contemplate

'those Ideas which are its true home' (Bell 1984: 39). The soul, assisted by the Light itself, attempts to gaze upon the Light,

> But the light itself, which illumines the soul so that it sees truly all intellectual things either in itself or in that (light), is another thing altogether; it is in fact, God himself. But this (*anima*) is a created thing, although rational and intellectual and made in his image, and when it tries to gaze upon that light, it quivers because of its weakness, and hardly succeeds at all. (Quoted in Bell 1984: 75)

God is the Light by which we see God Himself. As Bell notes 'God ravishes the mind and plunges it into his light, and by that light the mind is both enlightened and cleansed, and so made deserving of the undeserved state in which it finds itself' (1984: 76–8). An experience of God for St Augustine is always an experience of Light. He is the light by which we see our own selves, our own souls. The soul or *mens* possesses both inferior and superior reason. As a person matures, she becomes less concerned with *scientia* and more concerned with *sapientia* as she contemplates eternal realities (Bell 1984: 38). The creature is therefore similar to and different from the Light it seeks. For St Augustine only Christ is *the* image of God (*imago Dei genita*) and humanity is made to (*ad*) the image of God. Humanity is not made in the image of God as Christ is.

Through the sacramental life of the Church and the workings of the Holy Spirit, a person's latent participation in God (which is universal) becomes more explicit. Although God is present to everyone, many may not be conscious of it. The challenge for humanity is to make this presence explicit and live in accordance with its demands. Since humanity is made in God's image, we have a responsibility to protect this reflection. The challenge, therefore, is to actualize the 'participation' in God and the liturgy of the Church has the task of achieving this goal. The process is a gradual and demanding one. However, as I have indicated, humanity is not left alone. God's grace and charity are given to assist the process and baptism starts the restoration. St Augustine writes how he wept when he heard 'hymns, songs and the voices that echoed through your church'. Such sounds, 'flowed into my ears, distilling the truth in my heart' (quoted in Catholic Church 1994: 265). At baptism, St Augustine was 'lost in wonder and joy' as 'truth seeped into my heart … feelings of devotion overflowed' (quoted in Catholic Church 1994: 190). The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are crucial for making this participation in God real.

The Incarnation and Desire

The realization that one is neglectful of God's light is the first step towards the return, the acknowledgment that there is a place of unity towards which humanity can venture, 'another place' of absolute rest. Such a realization prompts the salvific movement, the treading of the path back to the Father, to one's homeland, to the origin from which one became separated. What is required is the commitment to open the light of one's eyes 'once more to the eternal light' (von Balthasar 1995: 106) This return is made possible by the Incarnation, God's *kenosis*, which is the revelation of beauty and the path back to the Truth. In recognizing God's eternal

beauty in the form of a slave who enters an alienated world, we come to recognize our own alienation too.

The search and desire to know God not only comes from St Augustine's ambivalent understanding of the beauty of the world but also from its 'horror' linked to Christ's suffering (Williams 1990: 80). In the *Discourse on the Psalms* St Augustine shows a deep understanding of the suffering of the world linked to the suffering and death of Christ. The horror and devastation of the world should not blind us, however, to the fact that the source of the world is Beauty. What is required is humility so that we may, like Job, accept our nakedness and dependence on God and come to Him. But more than this, in Christ we see an example of human vulnerability, grief and pain where goodness and beauty are trampled on. Christ gives voice to all human suffering especially when he endures Gethsemane with his cry of anguish, 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' Williams suggests that the two Scriptural references St Augustine uses from the *Discourse* provide the key to the whole of Scripture and are: Paul on the Damascus road, 'Why persecutest thou me?' (Acts 9:1–9) and Matthew 25, 'Inasmuch as you have done it …' Here the identification of Christ with suffering humanity is revealed. As Williams writes, 'To become Godlike is to accept crucifixion by the destructiveness of the world' (1990: 83). There is no route to God except through suffering. We pass 'from His pattern to His Godhead (*in* PS. 119.1)' (quoted in Williams 1990: 83). God's and Christ's divinity is hidden in the humiliated figure of Christ. Through faith we grasp darkness and silence, declaring his mercy 'at night' in the middle of the world's chaos. Nearness to God and likeness to God are the same thing and the cross is our model for our likeness (1990: 84).

The desire which motivates us is rooted in the 'affections'. Desire impels us to 'strain forward'. Like other early Christian Fathers, St Augustine knew the biblical Song of Songs well and quotes from the text in his *City of God*. The earthly city can never find lasting peace and although, as I have indicated, the beauty of creation is a thing to be admired, its purpose is to lead us to a more permanent beauty. Those who put their absolute trust in building an earthly city, even acknowledging the good which comes from acts of justice and goodness, will always feel alienated. God alone is our resting place. In his old age St Augustine was keen to challenge those who simply used logic to explain the world and in the last book of the *City* he reminds his readers of the miracles which have taken place in Christian history. The laws of ancient physics were insufficient to account for the world. St Augustine became concerned with 'healing the eyes of the heart' (Brown 2000: 420) and taught that the will is a swirling mixture of emotion and competing impulses overriding the control of reason and playing a far greater role in human identity. But St Augustine claims 'if the will is perverse, the emotions will be perverse' (1998: 14.6); these are another name for the will. *Apatheia* is not something to be esteemed if it means the avoidance of emotions. Christ Himself was no stranger to emotions; He who had the body and mind of a man could not be devoid of emotion. For St Augustine, 'affections' have a proper place, therefore, in the Christian life; and those with 'natural affections' will be able to lead a blessed life, since a righteous life will exhibit emotions properly. During the pilgrimage of the present life it is fitting that people feel fear and desire, pain and gladness (1998: 14.9), just as Christ did.

To be human is to desire, to be drawn and moulded by extra-rational, even extra-mental choices and attractive forces. In his account of his experience at Ostia with his mother, Monica, the emphasis is on the heart, the *affectus*, which must 'imagine' or 'figure' and recognize Him as its resting place (Williams 1990: 77). God is known by *sapientia* and, as Williams succinctly puts it, 'And contemplative knowledge can be only the knowledge of love, of desire and delight, the will consenting to the drawing of the divine beauty' (1990: 77). Christ is the Truth and it is as Truth that the Logos appears as the sum and synthesis of all things. St Augustine uses the language of adoption as sons and daughters and is not fond of the Greek terminology about divinization. It is through baptism that our identification with the Son takes place.

The Movement Unveils: St Aelred of Rievaulx

A contemporary of Hugh of St Victor and St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Aelred was born in Hexham in the North-East of England in 1110. Formed in the *Rule of St Benedict* by the 'White Monks', the Cistercians, he was often referred to as the 'Bernard of the North'. He eventually became abbot of Rievaulx in North Yorkshire in charge of 650 monks and began writing some of the classics of monastic literature, his most famous being *On Spiritual Friendship*, *On Jesus at Twelve Years Old*, *Treatise on the Soul* and the *Mirror of Charity*. Many of his renowned sermons were also published.

St Aelred argues throughout the *Mirror of Charity* that because the human soul is created in the image of God, it is capable of 'participation in his wisdom and blessedness' (quoted in Hallier 1969: 4). Many religious writers of the twelfth century reflected at length on the doctrine of humanity made in the image of God, and in particular, on its nature in its pristine pre-fallen state (Chenu 1968; Constable 1998a). Monks had heard for centuries the inspiring words of Leo the Great in his Christmas sermon beginning 'Recognise, O Christian, your dignity' (quoted in Constable 1998a: 286). The hope of salvation for many people lay in this understanding of the renewal of the soul in accordance with the image of God in which it was created. This belief in human nature was the basis for Christian teachings on the dignity of humanity.

Human nature was understood as God had made it at the start of creation, as being perpetually oriented towards God, destined to enjoy Him in the beatific vision (Hallier 1969: 6). Its fallen, estranged, sinful state was in need of constant renewing and redemption. Humanity's challenge was to recover the likeness it had lost at the Fall. Influenced strongly by an Augustinian Trinitarian model, St Aelred claims that the soul is made up of three parts: memory (*memoria*), intellect and will. *Memoria* is a kind of storehouse of images received through the senses (a theme I shall take up in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 3).[2] Reason distinguishes humanity from the animals and between good and evil, justice and injustice, giving outward

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2   Carruthers's magisterial text on memory in the Middle Ages claims that, 'The matters memory presents are used to persuade and motivate, to create emotion and stir the will' (1998: 67). Memory, although a form of knowing, is better understood as being moved, a moral activity rather than something intellectual or rational. The modern notion of making a

expression to those things stored in the *memoria*, and the will combines with reason to produce free-will, *liberum arbitrium*, but needs grace to pursue the good. In his *Treatise on the Soul*, St Aelred describes further his theocentric anthropology. The soul is not contained within the body but *contains it*. Being made in the image of God, the soul vivifies and gives life to the body, suffering no corruptibility. It is a 'simple' not a composite reality. What distinguishes the soul in humanity from animals and plants is the faculty of reason. This works in conjunction with the memory and the will. The material and immaterial are united through a medium called *sensus*, half-corporeal and half-spiritual.

God's image is constitutive of the soul and as long as the soul endures, so does the image. St Aelred was one of the first of the Fathers to distinguish between image and likeness. When used in conjunction with image, likeness means perfection, but a perfection which is bestowed as gift, which is gratuitous (*impressa per gratiam*) and is added over and above (*superaddita*). This supernatural likeness brings the soul back to its pristine beauty. Humanity has an innate *capacity* for God which is able to ensure its happiness. Because humanity has been created in the image of God it is blessed by its intimacy with God: 'Only an intellect-endowed creature is capable of such blessedness as this. Created in the image of its Creator, it is able to cling to him, to him whose image it bears; this being the sole content of such a creature' (quoted in Hallier 1969: 8).

Happiness consists in a willing consent to return to the Father's love; this is a most natural movement. In contrast to the animal realm, the opportunity to love God is humanity's special privilege and a gift of his rational nature. Humanity is driven by a natural desire for divine happiness, for a good beyond all material form. And as Merton notes in his discussion of St Aelred,

> Man is in his basic structure *capax Dei*. He is an openness, a capacity, a possibility, a freedom, whose fulfilment is not in this or that isolated object, this or that circumscribed activity, but in a fullness beyond all 'objects', the totality of consent and self-giving which is love. (Quoted in Hallier 1969: ix)

Consent to the Return

What is required is to restore the divine likeness shattered at the Fall. Since this tragedy, humanity has been living an estranged existence in an alienated land. After the Fall, humanity simply remembers, loves and knows himself, no longer God. St Aelred postulates the possibility of a return to the right place within God's order, taking his cue from the Prologue to the *Rule of St Benedict*. Before the Fall, he comments in one of his sermons, 'Unwearyingly man's memory held God; his intellect knew him unerringly; his will, un-distracted, enjoyed him by love' (quoted in Hallier 1969: 10–11). But humanity was in transit and by free will could choose the way of wretchedness. The movement away from God was due to the mind's *affectus*, its inclination to move towards that which *appears* good. The memory became liable

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distinction between memory and imagination where memory is concerned with the 'real' and the imagination with the 'unreal' was unheard of in the Middle Ages.

to forgetfulness, intelligence subject to error and love skewed towards selfishness. Humankind withdrew from God's love by situating himself in a land of 'unlikeness' a commonly used expression in the Middle Ages and for St Aelred, following St Bernard of Clairvaux, this refers to the soul wandering aimlessly and alienated, in exile. What is required for a return is that the memory be activated alongside right knowledge and love. In *Mirror of Charity* he writes, 'The reformation of the image (of God in man) will be perfect if no forgetfulness corrupts memory, if no error casts a shadow over knowledge, and of no stupidity obstructs love' (quoted in Constable 1998: 287). This is not an intellectual process but a journey of charity in which the soul is drawn back to the divine centre (Squire 1969: 45).

Grace enables the soul to find its way back to peace, since, like the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, He is always mindful of the lost son and has imprinted upon his soul His image. As Hallier comments, 'The tendency of the soul, God's image, towards him, is something that belongs, as a characteristic property, to its nature ... If he turns away from God, he goes astray and contrary to his own nature, and so causes his own unhappiness; if he tends towards him, he finds his own fulfilment and his happiness besides' (1969: 16). But it is only through grace that she can be restored to his former state – 'only grace lifts the will to holiness' (quoted in Hallier 1969: 18); although humanity can by itself destroy the image, only God can restore it to its former state. The spiritual life, therefore, for St Aelred, is always acknowledged as a re-turn, a restoration, a 're-demption'. Which is the way back? Like St Bernard, St Aelred emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge and consent. The soul suffers because it is divided, unable to realize its destiny in clinging to God. In other words, the memory has forgotten who it really is. For St Aelred the way back is through willing agreement: with grace it is possible to consent to good always. With an understanding reminiscent of St Augustine, St Aelred writes that if the soul does not agree freely to this return it will remain in a state of restlessness and unhappiness, divided within itself. The economy of salvation comes about through Christ, who is the Image, the perfect likeness of the Father. But the way of Christ is also the way of the cross and we must recognize 'our way of life is for us the Cross of Christ' (quoted in Hallier 1969: 22). A person must consent wholeheartedly to others in charity and love and to the God who created them and in whom they find their happiness, in order to progress spiritually in this renewal of their own image.

St Aelred tells his monks that in order to achieve a return a disciplined routine of spiritual practice is required. This centres on three things: first, reflection on the Scriptures and commentaries by the Fathers; second, involvement in the life-giving liturgy and third, the loyal following of the *Rule of St Benedict*. Essentially all three take place in a liturgical context. The Word can only pierce the heart and go beyond a mere literal understanding and know what is hidden beneath the veil of the letter if it is heard in a prayerful manner. *Lectio divina*, the slow meditative reflection on sacred writings, is correspondingly, a central practice within the *Rule of St Benedict*, and acts as the foundation of all reading; if conducted with a humble heart much fruit will be produced as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

The Importance of Liturgy

St Aelred claims that the liturgy and Scripture are the two central means of bringing about the return to the lost image and likeness. They have a mysterious efficacy. The symbolic enactment of the liturgy, including the Word, is the means of contemplating the history of salvation. The liturgical year celebrates a three-part redemptive scheme: the work Christ completed in the past, the blessings he bestows now and the hope for the life to come. What words cannot achieve, symbols and music convey and become invitations to rise to the hidden reality signified in the liturgy: 'Chant signifies the saints' – constant celebration because of the unspeakable joy they have in God. Hymns signify that unutterable praise by which they always praise God ... Lights signify that perpetual light in which the saints of God dwell' (quoted in Hallier 1969: 103).

The desire for God is stirred up by the liturgy, which is the expression of the mystery of God's plan of redemption. St Aelred's sermons highlighted the importance of the liturgical feast days for creating desire for God and, as Hallier comments, 'The liturgical life, understood in this way, seemed to realize for St Aelred the ideal he had formed in the monastery as "a house of God and gate of heaven"' (1969: 104). St Aelred's love of Scripture, like the liturgy, is reflected in his insistence that they contain hidden mysteries. Many medieval monastic writers sought the hidden meaning of the Scriptures and wanted to come to the knowledge concealed beneath the veil of the letter (de Lubac 1998). Monastic communities recognized the importance of this hidden revelation and that it was only given to a disciplined soul, which must itself retain its own sense of mystery if it were to be rewarded. The monk of the Middle Ages using the technique of *lectio divina* drew from the sacred text's meaning and strength for his own spiritual life and assisted him in devotion. For St Aelred, therefore, the reading of Scripture, the experience of liturgy and preaching in Chapter are all inter-related. The mysteries which had been foretold in the Scriptures were performed before their eyes and recounted in homilies.

A monk's life consists in keeping a mind on the things of eternity, and his life in the monastery must be an angelic one, of vision and praise, which will eventually be his in fullness in heaven. In *On Jesus at Twelve years Old*, St Aelred parallels Jesus being lost for three days with the soul's contemplative ascent to God. In Chapter 12, he comments, 'never forget your longing sighs, your words to Him Whom your soul loves, and the love which brings out in you the desire to see your lover (2001: 53). God loves to find a soul 'urgent in its requests ... The whole of heaven hears the voice of such a yearning soul, while the fragrance of its longing, wafting up to heaven, makes sweet the city of God' (2001: 53). The soul, through contemplation, must pass from Nazareth to Jerusalem, where it will find 'the things of the spirit' and Mary who is Charity and Joseph who is the Holy Spirit will accompany those on the journey: 'If we pass from Nazareth to Jerusalem, from toil to rest, and from the fruit of the good life to the secrets of contemplation' (2001: 65) it is because these companions are always by our side helping and assisting us.

William of Saint Thierry

A contemporary of St Aelred, the French Cistercian William of St Thierry, in 1098 became a Benedictine monk in the Abbey of Saint Nicaise and in 1119 was elected abbot of Saint Thierry, eventually resigning to join the Cistercian abbey at Signy. The influence of St Augustine on William of St Thierry's thinking and writing is not difficult to discern. The strong emphasis on the interiority of the self wherein one locates the divine coupled with its correlative – the dignity of the human person –constitutes the basis of humanity's searching for peace. Reflecting on the Song of Songs, William writes, 'Know yourself because you are My image, and so you can know me, whose image you are, and you will find Me within yourself. If you will be with Me, in your mind, then I shall recline with you, and from there I shall pasture you' (quoted in Constable 1998a: 276). By means of the *memoria*, the *intellectus* and *amor*, the Trinitarian analogies in each person, we can experience something of the Trinity. The memory has images of that to which we must strive; it has the capacity to remember the powerfulness and goodness of God (Pennington 1998: 38). As William writes in *The Nature and Dignity of Love*, 'As we discuss love's birth let us remember that when the triune God created us to his own image he formed in us a sort of likeness of the trinity wherein the image of the Creator-Trinity was to shine out' (quoted in Pennington 1998: 37).

For St Augustine and William of St Thierry, things only exist due to their participation in God or by virtue of their likeness to God – likeness was participation. Similar to many twelfth-century religious writers, he clarifies the notion of *imago Dei* by including an emphasis on its relation to likeness and participation (Bell 1984: 89–90). Deeply influenced by St Augustine, William argues that things only exist because of their participation in God, or you might say, by their likeness to God, for both words mean the same thing. What is needed is the *actualization* of our participation in God and therefore the task for which we are all created is to let the divine image shine forth and to avoid any occasions which encourage a fading of the image. Clearer vision follows greater likeness and is associated with a gradual spiritual growth, a tendency towards fruition, a theme emphasized towards the end of the *Golden Letter*. Seeing (vision), likeness and participation are the same thing.

Every creature exists because it is 'known' by God, since in God is the 'principal essence' of every creature. Therefore, all *rationes* (ideas), from which all things derive and to which they ultimately return, come from God. For example, characteristics like beauty and wisdom only exist by virtue of their participation in ultimate Ideas of Beauty and Wisdom. And wherever we discover goodness, for example in devotion, we find a trace or *vestigium* of God. Ideas or *rationes* are located in the soul; it is impossible to describe these fully since those things which pertain to God can only be perceived by love not knowledge. It is in the *memoria* that we carry the memory of our creator. At creation, memory was put into humanity to assist her in remembering the power and goodness of God and its own participation in the divine. But the memory becomes dim and obscured by human weakness. As Bell comments, 'Man's latent participation in God ever remains, and therefore he retains this capacity, the potential to become deiform…' (1984: 109). The potentiality is never lost even if humanity fails to live up to the potentiality to be aware of its identity. Nevertheless,

the soul has a natural tendency, a *pondus*, an urge, a loving desire, to return to that image which has become blurred. This movement of *conversio* never ceases if we are able to co-operate with God, who incessantly calls us back to Him. The challenge is to remember this truth.

During the twelfth century a renewed interest in the Genesis passage on the image of God in humanity became apparent. By imitating Christ it was possible to restore the lost image of its original nature. A person's present condition was often expressed by a metaphor of exile and strangeness; however, the journey back to paradisal harmony was possible. William speaks of this self-created exile as both an opportunity for return and salvation or for further alienation and unlikeness: 'Meanwhile, I have been a foreigner too long. I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Kedar, very much an exile have I been in soul' (quoted in Pennington 1998: 25). It is upon eternal ideas that a human person must model himself.

The progress in the spiritual life is an interior one and involves a realization and remembering of who we are. Therefore, self-knowledge becomes essential in the process. Perfect knowledge and likeness is not possible in this world and at times self-knowledge can be a sad realization of how far we are removed from God. But royalty and dignity are strongly associated with humanity's creation as *ad imaginem Dei* and it is to this truth that William points us. Self-knowledge can never be realized fully since this entails full knowledge of God, but some acknowledgement is best experienced through love. Again, the apophatic strain is strong in William. In one of William's *Meditations* he prays

> Open to me, therefore, Lord, that I may come to you and be enlightened by you. You dwell in the heavens but you have made darkness your secret place, even the dark waters amid the clouds of the air ... Sometimes indeed I hear your Spirit's voice. Though no more than the whistling of a gentle air that passes me, I understand the passage, 'Come unto me and be enlightened'. (Quoted in Pennington 1998: 66–7)

This unknowable and incomprehensible God for William is both immanent and transcendent, interior and exterior. But like St Augustine, the question he poses is – if He is so much with us, how is it that we are not with Him? The claim by both writers is that we not conscious of his presence. The immanence of God remains but the recognition fails; we are not aware of our participation. Therefore, our recognition of ourselves as people of dignity and nobility consists, as a result, in an act of remembering. God established 'the power of memory, so that we might always remember the powerfulness and goodness of the Creator' (quoted in Pennington 1998: 38). William, like St Augustine, also reminds us that we must 'see' temporal things in the right way. This is not the beauty of which Denys and Plotinus speak.

> Accustomed to temporal things, we must be cleansed by temporal things. And once cleansed, we shall not be worthy of contemplation of the eternal unless, in the process of being purified by temporal things, we have summoned forth faith. These things are indeed temporal and transitory, but through the first fruits of the Spirit they nevertheless bear the first fruits of things eternal. (Quoted in Pennington 1998: 112)

St Teresa of Avila

Nowhere do we see the integration of the transcendent and the intimate more beautifully pronounced than in the life and works of St Teresa of Avila (R. Williams 2000; McLean 2003). Like St Augustine, St Teresa understands redemption as the divine movement of love into creation and the soul. To be part of this divine movement is to 'consciously' accept and acknowledge it in yourself through a journey towards the core of your being, made possible by a formation in the ways of prayer and reflection. St Teresa herself relates how a feeling of Christ's presence would come upon her at certain times: 'He was within me or I totally immersed in Him' (1976: 74.10.1), entailing an ecstatic movement of the soul. Then, 'The soul is suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside of itself. The will loves; the memory, it seems to me is almost lost; the intellect does not work discursively, in my opinion, but is not lost' (1976: 74.10.1).

Such a recognition of the beauty of the soul is the start of the homecoming back to the One who is Beauty. Like St Augustine, the most intimate is the most transcendent; St Teresa knows that the beauty she finds within has an ultimate source without. As Johnston notes, 'Teresa … is acutely aware that this beauty is not, so to speak, inherent in the psyche but is derived from the Master who dwells within and is a reflection of his beauty' (1989: 41). He goes on to say, 'The soul is beautiful because it is made in the image of God … I am good and beautiful precisely because I am a mirror which reflects the goodness and beauty of the Father' (1989: 42).

In 1554 at the age of 39, St Teresa received a copy of a Spanish translation of the *Confessions* of St Augustine and in *The Way of Perfection* she refers to this when defending her notion of prayer in relation to the God who is to be found within. She writes, 'Remember how St Augustine tells us about his seeking God in many places eventually finding Him within himself ... Do you think … there is no need to go to heaven to speak with one's Eternal Father or find delight in Him? However softly we speak, he is near enough to hear us. All one need to do is go into solitude and look to Him within oneself' (quoted in Callahan 1989: 117).

With this recognition, St Teresa reflects a dominant Christian spiritual tradition, stemming from St Augustine up to the modern day, which locates the *reditus ad cor* – return to heart – as the return to God. This spiritual return is seen as 'a journey home', a return to 'ourselves' (Howe 2006: 35). It is to 'follow our deepest instinct', to 'recover our original harmony' and to 'be consistent with our nature' (Howe 2006: 35). Dupré's account of the 'mystical self' draws attention to this understanding. 'To the religious mind the soul is always more than it is, it transcends itself, so that the way inward must eventually become the way upward or downward (depending on the scheme one adopts)' (1976: 93). To lose God, in this way of thinking, is to lose oneself. A development of Plato's notion that the soul longs to be united with the divine forms to which it is related, it situates the encounter of God at the depths of the self along with the notion that to experience such depths is to experience the transcendence of God. The self, therefore, is always much more than a self. As Dupré comments,

> the ultimate message of the mystic about the nature of the self is that the self is *essentially* more than a mere self, that transcendence belongs to its nature as much as the act through

which it is immanent to itself, and that a total failure on the part of the mind's part to realise this transcendence reduces the self to less than itself. (1976: 104)

I shall develop this theme in my discussion of Rahner in Chapter 5.

'Both I and Someone Else'

One of the most insightful exponents of this model of spirituality is the twentieth-century Trappist monk Thomas Merton. A central theme for him is that the contemplative life consists in acknowledging what a person's true identity is. In *Seeds of Contemplation* he writes, 'For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and discovering my true self' (quoted in Shannon et al. 2002: 417). The illusory or false self is often taken for the real self. The former is ego driven and has no substance; it keeps humanity enslaved to a life on the surface of reality and is termed by Merton an 'alienated self' or 'smoke self' or 'an evanescent self' (Shannon et al. 2002: 417). The goal is to unmask the illusory and alienated self and to become 'aware of the presence within us of a disturbing stranger, the self that is both 'I' and someone else' (quoted in Shannon et al. 2002: 418). The way to achieve this is through a dying to the false self and a rebirth into the self which is not swayed by external conditioning. Merton writes that there must occur, 'a deepening of the new life, a continuous rebirth, in which the exterior and superficial life of the ego-self is discarded like an old snake skin and the mysterious, invisible self of the Spirit becomes more present and more active' (quoted in Shannon et al. 2002: 418). Contemplation awakens a person to the realization that, 'life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source' (quoted in Shannon et al. 2002: 419). It involves that 'Our knowledge of God is paradoxically a knowledge not of him as the object of our scrutiny, but of ourselves as utterly dependent on his saving and merciful knowledge of us' (quoted in Shannon et al. 2002: 419–20).

Interior Castle

At the start of *Interior Castle* St Teresa tells us to imagine the soul to be like a 'castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places' (1980: 283.1.1). Taking as a central strand in her writing, God's creation of people in His own image, she declares with delight how the King of the castle resides within each person. The soul, as a result, has a 'magnificent beauty' and besides this a 'marvellous capacity' to venture towards this beauty (1980: 283.1.1). Indeed, as Jantzen notes, 'Although Teresa has much to say about human sinfulness, her central conception is of the self as having great dignity and beauty, often unappreciated because of poor self-esteem' (2000: 699). But do not exhaust yourself, says St Teresa, in trying to grasp or understand this beauty since this castle is a creature and 'therefore, between it and God is the same as that between Creator and His creature' (1980: 284.1.1). The disappointment is that we do not know who we are at our centre: 'It is a shame and unfortunate that through our own fault we don't understand ourselves or know who

we are' (1980: 284.1.2). Unfortunately, the demands of the body invariably prevent this self-realization and we 'seldom consider the precious things that can be found in this soul, or who dwells within it, or its high value' (1980: 284.1.2). Thus, little effort is made to preserve this beauty of the soul. But the castle has at the centre a point where secret exchanges between God and the soul take place and it is this place which St Teresa is concerned about and keen to exhort others to find.

St Teresa argues that if we accept that the castle is the soul, then it seems we do not need to enter it since it is within oneself. But she tells us that there are many different ways of entering the castle and 'there are many souls who are in the outer courtyard – which is where the guards stay – and don't care at all about entering the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within, nor even how many rooms it has' (1980: 285–6.1.5). There are so many souls who are accustomed to being involved with external matters that it seems they 'cannot enter within themselves' (1980: 286.1.2). 'They are now so used to dealing always with the insects and vermin that are in the wall surrounding the castle that they have become almost like them' (1980: 286.1.2).

Since the soul has many dwelling places it must 'enter within itself' (1980: 286.1.2) and the primary means of doing this is through prayer and reflection. The first step is actually entering the castle, although many at this first stage are still prevented from seeing the beauty of the castle since 'so many reptiles get in with them' (1980: 287.1.1). And 'it should be kept in mind here that the fount, the shining sun that is the centre of the soul never loses its beauty and splendour; it is always present in the soul and nothing can take away its loveliness' (1980: 289.1.2). Prayer is the starting point in considering the beauty of 'the heavenly interior building' where 'we shall find great comfort' (1980: 290.1.2). But if through sin and distractions the beauty is covered over like a 'black cloth being placed over a crystal' (1980: 289.1.2), then it will be difficult for progress to be made.

Having turned one's eyes towards the centre it will be necessary to reflect on how the soul is 'plentiful, spacious and large' and 'capable of much more than we can imagine' (1980: 291.1.8). The soul in prayer must never hold back in a corner but wander from room to room, not staying too long in one place alone. However, the room of self-knowledge is crucial and is only possible in relation to the King of beauty – we shall never know ourselves unless we strive to know God – for by 'gazing at His grandeur, we get in touch with our own lowliness' (1980: 292.1.9). We are who we are only in relation to Him at the centre. Fear comes by not understanding ourselves well enough. The transcendence and intimacy of God are therefore always held together by St Teresa. The faculties become better prepared for the good which enters the soul and they do this by dealing with the chasm that exists between the God's grandeur and our lowliness, His humility and our own unworthiness: 'our intellects and wills, dealing in turn now with the self now with God, become nobler and better prepared for every good' (1980: 292.1.10).[3]

3　The difference between St Augustine and St Teresa concerning spiritual self-knowledge is worth noting. The former suggests it entails the interaction of the three faculties of memory, understanding and will. The memory brings forgotten knowledge of the soul to the understanding, and when the soul is known to itself, as a result, the will binds all three

If a person is to enter the second dwelling place she must 'strive to give up unnecessary things and business affairs' (1980: 294.1.14); this abode refers to those who have begun to practise prayer once the interior journey has begun. But this room requires more effort, since the soul recognizes the dangers and 'there is great hope they will enter further into the castle' (1980: 298.1.2). St Teresa writes that 'What hope can we have of finding rest outside of ourselves if we cannot be at rest within' (1980: 302.1.9). The challenge is to acknowledge that outside the castle neither security nor peace will be found. Therefore the soul should avoid going about 'strange houses since its own is so filled with blessings to be enjoyed if it wants' (1980: 299.1.4). She encourages and exhorts her sisters to be strong on the inner journey: 'Through the blood He shed for us I ask those who have not begun to enter within themselves to do so; and those who have begun, not to let the war make them turn back' (1980: 302.1.9).

McLean suggests,

> The second mansion is a critical stage on the interior journey as it is the beginning of the often very painful and arduous process of interior transformation, purgation, and purification towards, and in, God. She describes the mansion as a dangerous, uncomfortable dwelling place. (2003: 149)

In the third mansion St Teresa focusses on the importance of humility for spiritual growth: 'Be convinced that where humility is truly present God will give a peace and conformity – even though he may never give consolation – by which one may walk with greater contentment than will others with their consolations' (1980: 308–9.1.9). As Burrows comments on this stage: 'The whole law of growth is a movement away from self' (1981: 31).

In the fourth mansion a significant change occurs since it is here that God does all the work. The 'intellect is incapable of finding words to explain' the experience (1980: 316.1.2). St Teresa makes a distinction between consolations and spiritual delights. The former are those experiences we have largely through our own efforts, our own meditations and petitions to God. The latter begin in God and St Teresa draws from her own liturgical experience at Prime to indicate something of this encounter. In the latter part of the verse at the end of the last psalm are the words, '*Cum dilatasti cor meum*' – 'the heart expands'. Using the image of a trough and water to explain this experience, she tells us that the water comes from its own source which is God. As a result, peace, quiet and sweetness become present in the 'very interior part of ourselves' (1980: 324.4.2). Again the absolute grandeur and at the same time intimate interiority of God is expressed. St Teresa exclaims when writing about spiritual delights, 'Oh, my Lord and my God, how great are your grandeurs! We go about here below like foolish little shepherds, for while it seems we are getting some knowledge of You it must amount to no more than nothing' (1980: 324.4.2).

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together in a Trinitarian model of love. For St Teresa, the exercise of the faculties in coming to know the self leads *towards*, but not actually to knowledge of the relations of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Ghost. She writes about the internal battles between the faculties, rather than suggesting their harmony in any Augustinian sense (Slade 1995: 104).

In the fifth mansion St Teresa uses the image of betrothal, which, in the sixteenth century, meant no turning back from marriage. The soul is being tested and prepared for a greater union described in the next mansion. The emphasis on 'hiddenness' is important and based on a line from Colossians (3:3–4): 'You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God.' She then uses the image of the butterfly which emerges from the silkworm by the practice of prayer, reading good books and hearing sermons. These act as remedies to a soul deadened by carelessness. As St Teresa comments 'When the soul is, in this prayer, truly dead to the world, a little white butterfly comes forth … How transformed the soul is when it comes out of this prayer after having been placed within the greatness of God and so closely joined with Him for a little while' (1980: 343.2.7).

At the sixth dwelling the 'soul is wounded with love for its Spouse' (1980: 359.1.1) and attempts to rid itself of all obstacles to this love and is determined to take no other spouse. The wound is 'something precious and would never want to be cured' (1980: 367.2.2). The soul would never want to be deprived of the pain says St Teresa but she admits that she cannot find the words to express it. The force of love is so powerful that the soul 'dissolves with desire' (1980: 368.2.4). The natural reaction is to 'make intense acts of love and praise' (1980: 370.2.8). Rowan Williams writes about the sixth mansion that, 'The profound union of will initiated in the fifth mansion is the hidden sustainer of the soul in the vicissitudes of the sixth'. The soul wishes to die and begs God to take it 'from its exile'. But this is a 'delightful torment' because it occurs due to the favours the soul has received from God (2000: 130). Burrows suggests that in this mansion 'The work of God in us now is consistent because we are consistent in our surrender' (1981: 90).
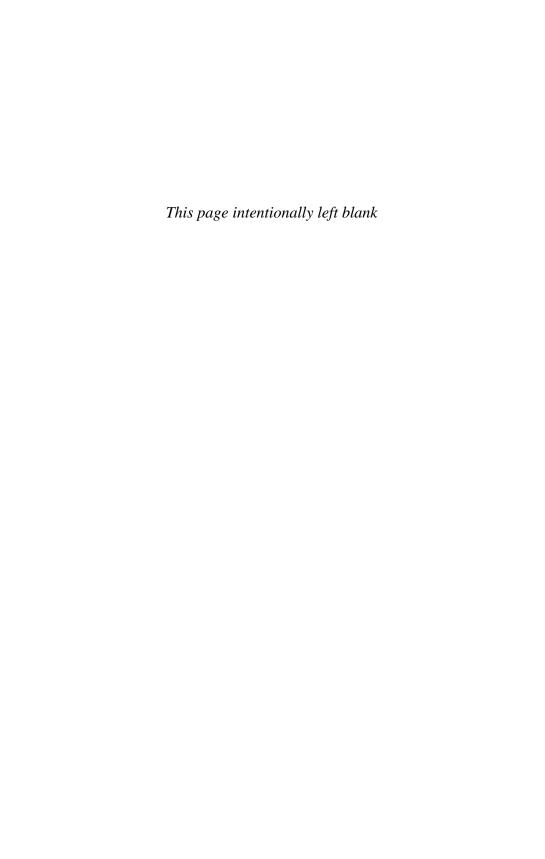
The seventh dwelling describes further the spiritual marriage which takes place: 'our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand' (St Teresa of Avila 1980: 430.7.1). Spiritual marriage, she writes, is a complete union, like 'the joining of two wax candles to such an event that the flame coming from them is but one, or that the wick, the flame, and the wax are all one' (1980: 434.7.2). Once in this dwelling, the soul is safe from falling again. One of the effects of all this is a self-forgetting combined with a complete desire to do the will of God, to the point of enduring suffering: 'the desire left in these souls that the will of God be done in them reaches such an extreme that they think everything His majesty does is good. If he desires the soul to suffer, well and good' (1980: 439.7.3). Again, the soul at this stage never wants to go without praising God.

Interior Castle itself ends on a liturgical note with St Teresa's recognition that although she has only written in detail about seven dwellings, there are many more within each of these, 'with lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths' (1980: 452.3). All point to the soul made in the image and likeness of God, which will wish to dissolve, as a result of such beauty discerned, 'in praises of the great God' (1980: 452.3). It is worth noting that St Teresa did not read much Scripture herself, especially in the light of the Catholic ban on the vernacular translations of the Bible and devotional works at the time. She recalls in her *Life* how she could no longer read because of the Inquisition's edict of 1559 banning the reading of many books in the vernacular. She felt that prohibition very much because reading some of them was an enjoyment to her. But God provided her with another means of 'reading',

in her visions. At first puzzled, St Teresa later learnt that these were to become her comfort. Such visions, often of the suffering Christ, spurred her into such love and desire that she had little or no need for books. Her major sources for her writing, as a result, would have been liturgical, primarily oral sources gleaned from sermons, confession and the Daily Office. Certainly, her translation of the Song of Songs for her *Meditation* would have come from the Daily Office of the Virgin, which Carmelite nuns recited daily except on feast days.

This chapter has traced the doctrine of *imago Dei* through a discussion of four theological writers. To recognize who we are and appreciate the 'wondrous material' (Pope John Paul II 1999: 1) of our own humanity, is to recognize the beauty and mystery of the divine self. It is my contention that liturgy has the social, material and aesthetic means to encourage this self-identity through its promotion of an anagogical ascent to the divine, which is none other than a journey into the core of the self. The worship of the future must recall to memory who we are in Christ and celebrate our identity as His adopted sons and daughters. I also indicated that St Augustine had an ambivalent attitude to beauty which influenced much later theological thinking, since by being impermanent and corruptible, material was always regarded as much as a snare or trap as it was a stairway, towards the divine. Sin, therefore, played a far greater role in his scheme of things than it did for Denys. Even in the first paragraph of the *Confessions* he emphasizes how humanity bears the scars of sin and death. Denys has a different emphasis. He offers a far more positive understanding of the created order centred around an overflowing emanation of divine beauty from its source and sees no reason to offer safeguards about its presence. It is my view that the latter should inform the practice of liturgy in the future.

In the next chapter I discuss and assess the role that imaging the divine has played within worship to assist this self-recognition in relation to 'another place' to which we ultimately belong. My aim is to demonstrate the paradoxical dynamic between the visible (cataphatic) and invisible (apophatic) worlds which images of redemption reflect, especially through their visible reflection of who we are and the place to which we belong. It is described by the twelfth-century Abbot Suger as 'dwelling in some strange region of the universe which exists neither in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of heaven' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 116). It is in this liturgical boundary space where images of 'another place' make their mark that worshippers begin to encounter and appreciate the transcendent Other as inseparable from the beauty of the self.

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Chapter 3

The Movement in the Image

In one of his sermons, the fifth-century Pope, Leo the Great, declared that 'What was visible in our Redeemer has passed into the liturgical ministry of the Church (*Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit in sacramenta transivit*)' (quoted in Taft 2003: 37). Fifteen hundred years later, Pope Pius XII expressed a similar idea in his 1947 encyclical on liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, that the work of redemption and its fruits are imparted during the celebration of the liturgy. The present Pope, Benedict XVI, has also claimed in his discussion of liturgy that, 'God has acted in history and entered into our sensible world, so that it may become transparent to him' (Ratzinger 2000: 131). Images used in worship 'do not merely illustrate the succession of past events but display the inner unity of God's actions … Images thus point to a presence; they are essentially connected with what happens in the liturgy. Now history becomes sacrament in Christ, who is the source of the Sacraments' (2000: 132). Liturgy has always given visible expression to the salvific work of Christ through its ritual re-enactments of His life. What Christ did as part of His ministry had to be 'translated' visibly by the Church into the action and imagery of the liturgy, if Christ's redemptive love was to be given to each generation over time. Salvation itself consists in our participation in the performance of liturgy and its imaging of 'another place' to which we are called.

Liturgy therefore, became the site for a seen event. Christianity has always been a response to an event, to something which happened and which changed the world as a result. This knowledge of the event of God was lost in modernity when 'God became all too comprehensible, an object of the speculative intelligence, grasped by reason' (Loughlin 1996: 179). As a consequence, Christianity was largely bereft of its aesthetic, particularly its iconic, constituent. But from the fourth century to the sixteenth century, Christianity had always been primarily an event communicated in and through its liturgy and it depended on the imaginative use of the visible to communicate this happening. It was an invitation to encounter a 'seen' happening of salvation through the ritualized gestures, movements and religious imagery brought together in a dedicated sacred space. Aesthetic means contributed significantly to this endeavour as they attempted to communicate a *visible, material and eventful* sense of the sacred, both transcendent and beautiful. Religious imagery played a significant part in this visible expression and was able to 'produce in the properly receptive viewer an event of meeting with the sacred' (Viladesau 2000: 144). As Pope Benedict XVI notes, 'The complete absence of images is incompatible with faith in the Incarnation of God ... Images of beauty, in which the mystery of the invisible God becomes visible, are an essential part of Christian worship' (Ratzinger 2000: 131).

Sacraments functioned as 'seen' actions of this event, leading the person to the unseen and the immortal. In the celebration of the Eucharist, for example, viewing the consecrated host with awe was as important as eating it. Swanson notes that during medieval times, 'The Christian faith was all around, was literally all-encompassing, especially if its allegorical elements are taken into account. Where almost everything could be taken to mean or represent something else, opportunities for the reinforcement of the faith were immense' (Swanson 1995: 87; see also Binski 2004). The symbolism and allegory of the visible allowed multi-layered, imaginative responses to take place with the experience of observation being given a richness and vitality, reflecting in Binski's evocative phrase a 'density of signification' (Binski 2004: 211).

Visual participation in religious imagery was crucial, therefore, in the role and life of the Church from the fourth century up until the Protestant Reformation (Miles 1985). Even 'the Scholastics, with their penchant for abstract reasoning and general mistrust of "mere" metaphor, granted sight an important role', writes Jay (1993: 42). Gregory the Great called statues the 'books of the illiterate' (Jay 1993: 41). And it was particularly within the context of public worship and devotional piety that Christians most frequently encountered the impact of the visual. But the stories told in stained glass windows, paintings, woodcuts and sculptures in parishes and cathedrals were not only a colourful backdrop to the spiritual life of the community which became reflected in the actions, objects, movements, gestures and words of the liturgical performances of the Church, but crucially operated as an incentive to imitation and contemplation. It became imperative that everyone partook of this mystery made *visible and material* in liturgy

From the fourth century onwards, the liturgy attempted therefore, to re-enact Christ's actions in relation to 'another place', the kingdom of which Christ himself spoke and made manifest in his ministry. Worship secured this performance of another way of being and acting by securing a bridge and co-extension between the earthly and heavenly abodes, between the world lived and the world to come. As Davies notes, the pre-modern world envisaged a 'cosmology by extension which placed heaven in the heavens, at a point far removed from the earth, but in a field of extension that was continuous with it' (2004: 15). For example, stained glass windows attempted to bring about this 'extension' through their translucent beauty. Like icons, such windows were meant to be looked *through* as much as looked at, literally reflecting and refracting a divine world through their use of light and radiant colour. As a result, 'another place' began to be felt and contemplated. For example, the production of stained glass had its origins, not in an overriding concern to illustrate, but in a desire to produce a contemplative mood through the sedation of light (Homan 2006: 64). As Reyntiens comments 'The connection between the sedation of light on the eye and the growth of the contemplative faculty in the mind seems always to have been known and acted on' (quoted in Homan 2006: 64).

Becoming an Image of the Image through the Beauty of the Archetype

The widespread appreciation of the religious image was not simply an aesthetic delight then, but an imaginative means by the Church to encourage worshippers' strongest

thoughts, emotions, devotions and memories in relation to the events of salvation and the world to come (Miles 1985: 8). It was part of a pattern of contemplative, affective and devotional piety which engaged the whole person, body, mind and spirit – one of the primary means by which the silence, majesty and transcendence of God in Christ could find expression. In the images which decorated the walls of churches and cathedrals, the invisible was made visible and the beyond brought near. Hugh of St Victor's main objection to any overriding reliance on the Word was its lack of competency to reveal the invisible world of religious meaning (Chase 2003). Images also had the potential to personally transform worshippers as they learnt to imitate what they saw. St Gregory of Nyssa claimed that 'we must become an image of the image, having achieved the beauty of the Prototype through activity as a kind of imitation, as Paul did, who became an "imitator of Christ"' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 40). Images pierced the hearts of onlookers and by their beauty witnessed the source of beauty: 'Insofar as it is beautiful, the art work evokes God as the object of desire, as what we are implicitly drawn toward by the spirit through the dynamism of the innermost "heart"' (Viladesau 2000: 145). By looking at images, onlookers encountered not only the beauty of the Christ and his message, but also a form of beauty which was revelation itself. Therefore, as Miles comments, 'the attraction of the Christian faith had nothing to do with linguistic analysis or creedal definitions' (1985: 57). The *via universalis* was the message received from visual participation (Miles 1985: 62; Swanson 1995; Eco 1986).

Pagans of the fourth century were often drawn to the Christian faith by the splendour and colourfulness of religious images, which conveyed a sense of the beauty of the religion to which they gave expression. Eco notes that 'Immediacy and simplicity characterised the medieval love of light and colour ... It confined itself to simple and primary colours' (1986: 44). Such visual spectacle was intended to lead onlookers to a Neoplatonic search for the 'white ecstasy' of divine illumination, a notion derived from the direction of pure light not having passed through a prism to produce different colours (Jay 1993: 39–40). The magnificent images within churches and cathedrals upheld for onlookers, therefore, an *invisible* world of order and harmony which at one level was removed from, and yet in touch with, the quotidian concerns of everyday existence, offering the opportunity of access to another reality, 'another place'. It was the practice of worship in relation to its architecture, aesthetics and drama, which pushed aside the curtain dividing the seen from the unseen to reveal a heavenly world of beauty and harmony, where God dwelt in both inaccessible *and* accessible Light.

Although the distance to this 'other place' was considerable, it was always reachable. As Miles notes, 'The accessibility of the spiritual world is perceived simultaneously with the perception of its great distance from the ordinary concern of human life' (1985: 111). This is well illustrated by the inclusion of the saints in stained glass windows, which acted as a bridge between God and humanity. At Chartres cathedral, for example, hundreds of local and patron saints decorate the glass and are part of the worshipper's world. As Male comments, 'The people never wearied of seeing their protectors and friends, for they felt to be on more familiar terms with them than they could be with an omnipotent and far-off God' (quoted in Homan 2006: 67). The faithful were pleased to see their own local environment

and back-breaking labour allied to the divine and sacred realm as the use of local industries, fishing, sheep farming, hills, landmarks and buildings within stained glass windows sanctified the ordinary and mundane, preventing worship from becoming separate from daily living (Homan 2006: 67–8).

Davies's account of the pre-modern world draws attention to this notion of the visible and invisible in liturgy. He uses the phrase 'cosmic phenomenology' to expose the elements of a form of perception radically different from our own today (2004: 26). He begins by making a distinction between the 'invisible' (that which can never be seen), and the unseen (that which is visible but which does not for the moment present itself to sight). Alluding to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Davies demonstrates how much of what we 'see' contains a strong dimension of the 'unseen' and how the construction of a world may be predicated upon our remembered or imagined capabilities: 'From the elements of the "seen" world, we build new unseen ones by practices of the imagination' (2004: 26). A crucial difference between the pre-modern world and our own lies in the virtues of extension and participation. The 'unseen' pre-modern liturgical world entailed a framing of the empirical world within the distant heavens above. This heavenly reality became present to the medieval person largely through the symbolic – the light, sound, space and time of everyday perceptions (2004: 27). Davies claims 'This is not the same as seeing such reality *toute coup* but it did allow a glimpse of what such a seeing might be like' (2004: 27). The interior of the church, 'filled with the sounds, colours and perfumes of heaven allowed the congregation to understand something of the invisibility of the heavenly realms, located beyond the stars' (2004: 17). Davies's point is a good one, that

> the traditional cosmos was one in which the unseen was nevertheless potentially visible and, as such, offered purchase to the human imagination as a place in which human subjects might themselves – in theory if not in practice – both see and be seen by the invisible powers who lay behind the realm of empirical perception. (2004: 27)

Davies argues that, in contrast, the realms that now dominate the empirical world are conceived not as entities but as forces, and we can get no 'sense-based purchase on these' (2004: 28). They are therefore invisible and we do not see 'the realms that circumscribe the empirical as being in any sense as comparable to or an extension of the empirical forms of the unseen …' (2004: 28). In the pre-modern world, the transcendent eternal realities became manifest in the empirical world and often assumed a symbolic character, seen most visibly in the liturgy. The temporal world looked to the 'time' of the Christian liturgy not only to ensure its connectedness to the life to come among the angels and saints, but to ensure that participants experienced the excess of God's love in their earthly lives. Worship was a proleptical and anticipatory experience, reassuring and transportative to 'another place' and at the same time rooted in the empirical reality of this world. The decline of the use of imagination during the modern period replaced a world which, although at times harsh, still offered a place to be, to feel at home in, to rest assured that there was a wholeness and unitive purposiveness to the experience of daily living in relation to an eternal reality. If this rested on a pre-scientific and literalist interpretation of the relationship between heaven and the earth, it nevertheless offered a sense of its

meaning which is now largely lost. Davies argues that the modern world finds little space for cosmic meaning and that any sense of being at home in the cosmos is articulated 'in the seeming absence of spiritual companions, the historical contingency of our origins and the precariousness of our fate' (2004: 29). The challenge of the liturgy of the future is to address this possibility of imagining 'another place' in relation to the one made visible in worship and experienced in the created order.

Seeing and Believing

Seeing was always associated with believing and commitment, permissible only to those who had been fully initiated into the cult. To see was to participate in the life-enhancing salvation of the Church. Preparation for full entry into the Church only sanctioned a partial seeing. For example, catechumens (those receiving instruction) were curtained off from the rest of the faithful until they had been fully initiated. After the hearing of Scripture, the reciting of prayers and the homily, the 'uninitiated' went to side rooms, where they could hear but not see the paschal mystery enacted (Miles 1985: 51). Sight, too, became associated with notions of good and evil and from the fourth century medical diagnoses were made with reference to 'good' or 'bad' eyes. Indeed, in popular belief and practice it was commonly accepted that visual experience was indispensable for the attainment of good or ill; the evil eye had the potential to poison the body or soul of one's enemy (Miles 1985: 7). This importance attached to sight is evidenced in St Augustine's belief that there was

> a fire within the body … collected with unique intensity behind the eyes; for an object to be seen, this fire must be projected in the form of a ray that is focussed on the object, thereby a 2-way street along which the attention and energy of the viewer passes to touch its object. A representation of the object, in turn, returns to the eyes and is bonded to the soul and retained in the memory. (Miles 1985: 7)

The relationship between seeing, knowing and remembering was strong.

One significant advantage of using images in worship is that the mode of communication and response becomes a silent one and therefore potentially contemplative. The Seventh Ecumenical Council stated of the icon, 'What the Word says, the image shows us silently; what we have heard we have seen' (quoted in Evdokimov 1996: 3). Icon is simply the Greek word for 'image' and the makers of icons tried to depict the light and energy of God made manifest in Christ's image. Icons were only made by those who themselves had been influenced by the Holy Spirit, their beauty reflecting the beauty of the One they depicted. Evdokimov claims that no-one can represent the image of the Lord unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. A person's only choice, therefore, if he is to perform this task well, is to become 'a complete and living doxology' (1996: 8). Williams emphasizes this notion of performance in relation to icons: 'creating an icon is after all something 'performed' in a fixed way, with the proper fasting and prayers, in the hope not that you will produce a striking visual image but that your work will open a gateway for God' (2003: xvii). An icon attempts to convey God's action and must be looked upon prayerfully allowing God, through it, to look at us. Onlookers therefore, have the possibility of

becoming aware of God's presence through the transfigured image of Jesus before them (Williams 2003: xviii–xx), which allows them to be transformed. As St Gregory of Nyssa says, you only 'become beautiful by coming close to my Light' (quoted in Evdokimov 1996: 11). St John of Damascus too writes about this transformational effect of icons in his First Treatise, 'I venerate the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation, without being lowered or weakened, that he might glorify my nature and bring about communion with the divine nature' (2003: 22). We carry in ourselves, says St Basil, '"a hidden *poetic logos*" and as a little god, *microtheos*, in a little world, microcosm, "he contemplates, in himself, the Wisdom of God, the beauty of the poetic *logoi* of the universe"' (quoted in Evdokimov 1996: 11).

As I have suggested, the Christian liturgy of the Middle Ages did not take its congregations to a place which was alien to them. It showed them another way of being and experiencing 'another place' that was a departure from and yet extension of the one they encountered every day. Cameron comments on how 'The Christianity of the later Middle Ages was a supple, flexible, varied entity, adapted to the needs, concerns and tastes (with all their undoubted crude primitive features) of the people who created it' (1992: 19). The offertory procession bore the gifts of harsh, everyday life. It was not until the all-pervasive sacramentality of the world, based on its unique and beautiful createdness, became reduced to the narrow confines of seven sacraments during the twelfth century, and after the Protestant Reformation, to two, that the sense of 'at home-ness' between creature and creation started to disappear. In the process, the world became disenchanted and new self-reflexive strategies emerged which attempted to *give rather than receive* meaning from the world (Weber 1992). This entailed a process of de-emotionalizaton, as creation became more neutralized and impersonal. The growth of an abstracted 'self-consciousness' which resulted meant that individuals became separated from creation and more reliant upon their own inner powers rather than God's gifts of grace, creation and beauty (Torevell 2000b: 118; Campbell 1987: 72).

Worship in the pre-modern world, therefore, always offered a disclosure of 'another place', which was largely opened up by its use of symbolism and imagery. It invited the imagination to float freely across the beauty and gift of the created world and its extension with the unseen. The liturgy made explicit this redemptive 'feel' of the cosmos and entailed a movement of ascent and transformation secured by prayer, devotion and praise. The divine was made known in creation and, through contemplative seeing, humanity started to be transformed into the image of the unseen God. As de Lubac makes clear in his publication, *Surnaturel*, of 1946, before the late Middle Ages Christians believed that the divine was a vital part of the created order and salvation a process of deification, offering an ontological change into the likeness of God, bearing in mind their created status (Milbank 2005: 16). The liturgical challenge of the future is to reclaim this sacramental significance and beauty of the created order and to appreciate its connection with that invisible world.

Images, Empathy and Sympathy

The idea that images were a means of revelatory disclosure, an illiterate person's Bible, was widely accepted in medieval epistemology (Miles 1985: 65) and entailed

a theory of knowledge strongly rooted in the role of feeling. Images were designed to 'affect' the emotions and thoughts of observers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But as Binski notes,

> An affect in medieval usage is not exactly an emotion in the modern (or Platonic) sense of something spontaneous, instinctive or natural in the domain of thinking, distinct from thought or will ... an affect is a state of mind or attitude, a disposition towards the world and things in it, which may be informed rationally. In its medieval form the notion of an affect owed much to the fundamental connection between emotion and cognition in Aristotelian psychology. (2004: 209)

The connection here between feeling and thinking is causal; 'emotions are prompted or moved by rational thought' (Binski 2004: 210), and are part of the rational faculty of judgement. They also lend themselves to be morally disciplined since the promotion of virtuous living informs both thought and feeling. The image became a device for reasoned persuasion through the encouragement of appropriate responses of thoughtful feeling. The choice of images, therefore, mattered since they had the potential to release appropriate or inappropriate reactions and responses to the sacred. That is why some crucifixes were termed a *crux horribilis* in the medieval period and were regarded as unhelpful for contemplative and prayerful practice. The 'appropriate' emotional response depended on the suitability of the image.

Thinking, Feeling and Moving in Images

Let us take an example from John Cassian's fifth-century *Conferences* (which were dialogues on the methods of prayer and reading for those living as monks and hermits in the Egyptian desert). He tells a story about the elderly monk and hermit Sarapion (who lived in the desert of Scetis) and the wise Abba Isaac. Sarapion became deeply disturbed when the patriarch of Alexandria expressed his concern about some Egyptian monks taking a too literalist interpretation of Genesis 1:26, about humanity being made in the image of God. This criticism deeply worried and upset Sarapion since he was attached to an image and thought the criticism applied to him. He had long held an 'affection' for his chosen image and had developed a humble and prayerful disposition towards what it revealed. Sarapion became troubled that

> the particular human image of God (*illam anthropomorphon imaginem deitatis*) which he used to draw (*proponere*) before him as he prayed was now gone from his heart. Suddenly he gave way to the bitterest, most abundant tears and sobs. He threw himself on the ground and with the mightiest howl he cried out, 'Ah, the misfortune! They've taken my God away from me, and now I don't have one I might hold on to, and I don't know whom to adore or whom to call out to.' (Quoted in Carruthers 2003: 71)

Cassian tells the story sympathetically because the error of Sarapion lies not in his contemplative practice but in misunderstanding the text of Genesis. Understanding likeness to mean 'truthful representation' rather than spiritual representation would mean committing the sin of idolatry and be a matter of mimesis. Indeed, some monks had imaged God in an unhelpful anthropological way as a response to the verse in

Genesis that 'man was made in the image of God'. But for Sarapion, the use of the image was as a contemplative device to sustain his prayerful devotion to the God of his life and this resulted in promoting within himself a 'picture' of his Saviour. When the image was forbidden, it was as if Sarapion's God Himself had been taken away, because the manner in which he was accustomed to pray (i.e., with an image before his eyes and therefore mind) had been removed. As Carruthers comments, 'The crucial issue … is not the "truth content" of images but their cognitive utility, their necessity as sites upon which and by means of which the human mind can build its compositions, whether these be thoughts or prayers' (2003: 72). Poor Sarapion could not find God any more without his favourite image. When the image was removed, it is not surprising that a strong emotional reaction occurred since the construction of images within the memory (*memoria*) was part of an emotional activity which stirred the will and fired the imagination and acted as a moral force. The wise Abba Isaac understood perfectly well that 'while we still hang around in this body' (quoted in Carruthers 2003: 73) we must use images. Therefore, the central point about the story of the images in Cassian's *Conferences* is about how images might be used appropriately in one's prayer life and not as a means for idolatry.

The relationship between seeing, knowing and loving God was strong in pre-modern times. Seeing as much as hearing was a primary device for attaining knowledge of God. In order to know we must first of all be able to 'see'. The mind must find its 'habitation', either literally a location or more commonly a site conceived as a mental phenomenon. The image is then able to act as a location or place of withdrawal. Consequently, spiritual seeing is constructed by means of our recollection of images of corporeal things: 'images are understood as the localizations or nodes of thought, what keeps thinking from being merely "noise" and structures it inventively' (Carruthers 2003: 73). Indeed, meditation for early and medieval monasticism was an advanced form of *memoria*. Some requirements for this operation were recommended: solitude, lack of crowding, clarity of light for the inner eye. Novices understand well that the goal of the monk is to witness *in this life an image of the happiness of the next*. Discipline was required for this to be realized and, for novices in particular, the external use of images assisted the spiritual journey which needed to be taken.

Germanus says to Abba Isaac that novice monks, in particular, often have a 'desire to have shown … some material form (*materiam*) for the memory, by means of which God may be taken hold of (*teneatur*) by our mind …' (quoted in Carruthers, 2003: 74). Indeed, Cassian's text does not make any distinction between words and images. Some images may be more advanced and symbolic than others but the way in which the monks come into constant remembrance of God was through those images which acted as a method of *memoria*. The novices easily became confused and 'shipwrecked' when images were abandoned; they then felt lost in their search for God. The wandering mind has nothing to return to if images are taken away. They act, therefore, as an anchor to prayer and spiritual thinking and feeling. Abba Isaac's point is that for human beings some kind of image or text must be used. There is no definitive expression of truth in such images but they are necessary, if at times concessions to human weakness, since they permit God to be taken hold of in the

mind and heart. Their disciplinary function within the mind comes about through their use as meditative prayer devices.

It was only St Bernard of Clairvaux, in his rather severe apology to William of St Thierry in 1125, who scorned lazy monks who relied on other people's images and thus became distracted from the interior prayer upon which they should be concentrating. He argued that lay people and clerics may need such aids, but Cistercian monks certainly do not! Bernard argues that real spiritual development does not require such external aids. Bernard might be an iconoclast, but he had the responsibility of encouraging monks to be the master craftsmen of their own mental images, if they were not to rely on those of other people. Spiritual reading, *lectio divina*, should suffice to construct the right mental images, he thought.

Disciplina

I now want to emphasize this pre-modern understanding of the interconnections between thinking, feeling and virtue by recourse to the *Rule of St Benedict* and its influence on later theological and liturgical understanding. Liturgy was designed to foster a way of feeling and thinking towards the world which resulted in a distinctive cultivation of the whole person. This is well illustrated in the development of monastic discipline from the time of St Benedict, which also significantly influenced those outside monastic gates. The medieval notion of discipline was far more complex than present-day understandings. The biblical use of the word *disciplina* is the Latin translation of the Greek word *paideia* which means the physical, intellectual and moral cultivation of the person. *Disciplina* in the *Rule of St Benedict* signifies good order, the text itself, and the form of proper conduct, including appropriate attitudes to be fostered. And this disciplined change in the person is brought about by an obedient following of God's law as represented in the *Rule* and safeguarded by the Abbot, Christ's representative on earth. In liturgical texts the word was invariably used to mean *the process* of teaching as well as the content of what was taught, which always came from God and his representative on earth, the Abbot. The *Rule* of St Benedict became the most important text for the 'disciplining' of the Christian self and the performance of the liturgy was the means by which the day was regulated and was integral to the notion of discipline.

Asad's critique of the development of virtue in medieval monasticism highlights the fostering of disciplinary practices, centred around the liturgy, which entailed a unique relationship between feeling and knowledge: 'The obedient monk is a person for whom obedience is *his* virtue – in the sense of being his ability, potentiality, power – a Christian virtue developed through discipline' (1993: 125). Monastic rites governed the economy of desire with force (punishment) and Christian rhetoric guided the exercise of 'virtuous desires' which had first to be fostered before any legitimate moral choices could be made: 'It stands, therefore, in contrast to our modern assumption that choices are *sui generis* and self-justifying' (Asad 1993: 126). Humility assumed a central role in the process and that was why a whole chapter was recorded on this in the *Rule*. The reconstitution of desire towards the divine *eros*, therefore, was necessary for any advancement in the spiritual life and the texts which formed the bedrock of this transformation were chanted liturgically,

pondered upon, recited publicly and became the basis of *lectio divina*. In other words, they became objects of performance, especially in the daily liturgy, and led to moral insight and development; they were not simply books to be read for the acquisition of knowledge.

Monastic sermons, too, were regarded as rites and many were given to re-integrate memories of sexual love (experienced before entering the monastery) with divine love. Biblical images (especially from the Song of Songs) were elicited to re-educate the mind and heart. Often allegorical modes of Scripture were given. Thus a dialogical process of initiation (education) was fostered which attempted to give space and time to a *self-formation* and a new motivation of desire. As Asad comments,

> For the program that aims to transform sensual desire (the desire of one human being for another) into the desire for God requires at the same time a change in the status of the monks as lovers ... The transformation thus culminates in an unconditional subjection to the law, in desire becoming the will to obey God – the supreme Christian virtue. And it was a transformation that sought to bridge a fundamental contradiction by actively playing on it. (1993: 145)

Asad reminds us that the use of such means 'is performed primarily not for the sake of an audience but for the sake of the performers, who are learning to exercise and to develop Christian virtues, to replace unlawful desires with virtuous ones, not to appreciate an aesthetic representation' (1993: 141). The imagery of the Song of Songs was invariably used and made its entry at the Divine Office. The office lectionary for August has extracts and readings from the Song, probably recited during the night office. The Song was closely connected to virginity but also employed nuptial symbolism to express its central ideas. In 'profane' texts the method consisted of reading the *accessus*, the introductions, which then encouraged readers to interpret everything in an ethical sense. The liturgy never became a performance of spectacle for mere self-indulgent delight, but a sacred ritual educating the virtuous self. All the ritualized and aesthetic devices used were attempts to 're-educate' and transform the hearts of the participants into the ways of Christ. What was seen and acted out became internalized and then imitated. This emphasis on discipline and the education of the 'right' feeling was important because the enrapturing power of the visible allowed a 'real' rather than simply a 'notional' assent (to use Newman's phrase) to take place, one which included a firmness of affective belief and conviction which went much deeper than mere intellectual grasp. This inter-relationship between feeling, understanding and the ritualized body was therefore strong in the pre-modern period (Flood 2004). A different person was formed through this ritualized and disciplined re-construction of the body, which included its emotional re-alignment.[1]

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1   Interestingly, Flood (2004) notes in his discussion of Buddhism in relation to the ascetic self how the Buddhist Pali literature points to the relationship between ascetical practices, ritual and the development of virtue leading towards the eradication of desire and volition: 'Asceticism is not merely a set of practices but an inner attitude of detachment, an intention (*cetana*) or act of will that, like other intentions, results in action that bears fruit' (2004: 129). The ascetic body enhances the virtuous body and allows it to move freely towards skilful

Image and Incarnation

It was the impact of Christ's image itself which offered the iconophile the prospect of a 'felt' sacred presence (Miles 1985):

> It was the Saviour who greeted the devout in the icon and often his image was transfigured into something more, into a corporeal gaze, into a look that touches. And this entailed an empathetic response from the onlooker, an identification with the one looked upon and translated quite naturally into the imitation of the One imaged. (Miles, 1985: 65)

I shall extend this idea of the 'look that touches' during Chapter 4 in my discussion of the face of beauty. The common image of Christ gazing outward into the eyes of the viewer not only sustained an empathetic identification but projected a contemporaneous immediacy. The images of Christ snatched from the past and brought into the present acted as an uplifting devotional support in public worship and private devotion. In the images of the tortured body of Christ and the yearning beauty of kenotic love, the Church's liturgy had an affective backdrop to encourage the faithful to empathize and identify with the One they looked upon and adored. This is particularly reflected in religious paintings during the medieval period. Good examples are those depicting Christ and St Francis in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which emphasized the wounded flesh of Jesus and St Francis's desire to be emotionally and spiritually united with his Saviour, painted as a physical embrace. As MacGregor comments, 'The flood of … art which issued from the Franciscan renewal … placed great emphasis on the human nature of Christ, his consciousness, his feelings and the physical pain he endured during the Passion' (quoted in Finaldi 2000: 52).

It was not surprising, therefore, that religious images became a central part of the Church's armoury since they encouraged imitation and pious devotion. Pain and suffering as the basis of intimacy with the crucified Christ remained a common theme in medieval Catholicism. The suffering and ill body was invariably identified with the broken body of Jesus on the cross, and those afflicted lifted up their own sufferings to the One who had suffered before them on behalf of others. The Grünewald altarpiece is a telling example of this. The imaginative and emotional response of seeing Christ's suffering identified with one's own was itself an act of devotion and love (Finaldi 2000: 106).

It was in the performance of the liturgy that devotion to the humanity of Christ was most clearly demonstrated, mainly in the Eucharist and elevation of the host, the hymns to the sacred heart, the Palm Sunday processions carrying the sacrament (begun in the eleventh century) and in the feast day of Corpus Christi (Constable 2003a: 280; Rubin 1991). The intense devotion to the Passion of Christ, especially on the cross, became a central devotional focus. The crucified body of Christ was

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ways of thinking and behaving. The development of mindfulness is a discipline of 'calling to mind' with *sati* or mindfulness being a form of remembering or not losing what is before the mind. It is 'presence of mind'. Crucially this entails mindfulness of feelings. As Flood writes, 'Through constant vigilance the monastic intends to create himself in conformity with the prescription of the teachings and ultimately, the Buddha' (2004: 139).

to become an image of all human suffering and many who were sick or on their deathbeds would kiss the feet of the crucified Christ, just as they did on Good Friday during the veneration of the cross. The sacrament of the Eucharist was not only a promise of personal salvation but a means of being incorporated into the body of the Church, the mystical body of Christ (understood to be both natural and supernatural) and into the body of society where works of charity and mercy were an expected consequence of receiving the sacrament (Mellor and Shilling 1997).

Images of Martyrdom – the Re-crucified Body of Christ

Architectural features and designs within churches and cathedrals became 'images' of salvation and often carried deeply symbolic layers of meaning based on biblical and liturgical themes. Let me take one example to show how this occurred. The choice of rose-pink marble within the apse surrounding the site of the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury in the twelfth century was highly symbolic. This colour blend was not repeated anywhere else in a Gothic church during this period and suggests a deliberate and reflective decision, one that celebrates the distinctive martyrdom it records. The colour was created from the blood-coloured stone and white limestone taken from Caen in France and became highly symbolic of martyrdom. What do such choices indicate? The grim horror of Thomas's death was assuaged and interpreted in the light of colour symbolism used in Scripture. The spilt brains and blood of Thomas – one reddening and one whitening the other – is compared to the lily and the rose as described in the Song of Songs 2:1. This can be traced back to medieval works on affective meditation on the Passion which noted the white body and red blood of Christ, attributes of his divine and human natures. Other biblical references underpinned white/red hues symbolism since the red/white imagery had associations with the two-colour garment imagery used Isaiah 63:1–3 and Revelation 7:14 (Binski 2004: 9). Biographical accounts also testify to St Thomas's garments being red and white like those in the Song of Songs 5:10. In the 1190s Pope Innocent III wrote *De missarum misteriis*, in which he developed the liturgical use of colour by setting down definitively the five symbolic colours of the liturgy (white, green red, black and violet) – with red representing feast days for apostles and martyrs and white for confessors and virgins. Besides colour symbolism, architectural imagery found its way into the liturgy of the Church via its biblical use (Galatians 2:9, Ephesians 2:19–22). The Winchester mass of St Swithun describes him as an 'Olympic column of shining glory' and Peter of Roissey's treatise on the liturgy used imagery of columns and other architectural and lapidary features. A lection for St Thomas's feast day compares him to the cornerstone of the Church, echoing Ephesians 2:20.

Binski comments that, 'Coloured marbles are "symbols" in the sense that symbols serve as the vehicle for conceptions' (2004: 9). The columns go beyond mere representation and carry what Binski terms 'something rhetorically "present" with humanly recognisable weight', which amounts to 'a form of real presence' (2004: 9). He suggests by such means 'Becket is embodied in the Church and the Church in Becket' (2004: 9). Indeed, many of the biographical accounts of Thomas compared his death to that of Christ, his murder before an altar indicating that Christ

was crucified again in Thomas's own death. Such descriptions were often based on liturgical and allegorical thinking. For example, the mixing of the two hues finds expression in the antiphon for Lauds on the feast of St Thomas in the Sarum Breviary.

The murder of St Thomas Becket became a common theme for sermons in the medieval preaching tradition. The story of his life and martyrdom spread throughout Christendom, coming to symbolize a courageous stand for the Church, whose rights and freedoms had been undermined. The story of how King Henry II had sent Thomas into exile in France and Louis VII's attempts to protect him and secure a reconciliation between the two parties was well known. By the late twelfth century, sermons were written for more popular audiences and in the vernacular, and invariably proceeded by the use of symbols, allegories and satire, elegy and rhymes which became partly responsible for spreading the cult of St Thomas. Archbishop Langton gave a memorable sermon on Becket which compares him to the Old Testament figure of Judas Maccabaeus, who himself had resisted temporal tyranny. The relics of Thomas came to represent and assure forgiveness of sins and, as a result, Canterbury became a place of significance for hordes of pilgrims. Many sermons were preached on Becket's feast day, December 29th, and this annual liturgy became the catalyst for emerging themes centred around the life of Becket. The lections in the Sarum breviary were re-read every year and kept alive the memory of the saint. Thomas became the shepherd who protects Christ's flock or lays down his life, the defender of ecclesiastical liberties, the person who imitates Christ's passion and death, an Abel, Zachariah or Christ, who offers himself for the good of the Church (see Roberts 1992: 27).

St Thomas's wearing of the hair-shirt is frequently mentioned in sermons, as are his fasts and vigils, and the miraculous cures before and after his death became a common theme in many sermons. But it was the image of the Good Shepherd, St John 10:11, which dominated and was drawn from St Thomas's feast day. The *bonus pastor* characterized everything Becket did and was to be an example to contemporary prelates. In the winter of 1220, Langton preached a great sermon about Becket and took as his Scriptural a reference from the Song of Songs – 2:3–4: 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love' (Binski 2004: 9). The homily describes how Becket endured exile, insults and finally death before being brought to the comfort of the Father's shade. The second text, Ecclesiasticus 50:1, 8 uses the symbol of the lily to represent Becket's suffering and the six leaves become the six years of exile, while the red seed at the top of the lily denotes his martyrdom (Binski 2004: 9).

One good example of the translation of the concept of martyrdom into material, architectural form is witnessed by the corona, the nine-sided polygonal building at the east side of the Trinity chapel in the Canterbury Cathedral. The Corona building became the place of display for the corona relic – the severed head of Thomas, a place where donations would be given by countless pilgrims who visited the site of his death. The corona also had another liturgical significance for it included the image of his tonsure, which represented his anointing as an ordained priest of the Church. This symbolism has been replicated elsewhere. For example, on the west

front at Wells Cathedral in Somerset, St Thomas is seen poignantly holding out in ritual gesture his own corona, an image of his martyrdom. This gesture also gives witness to another martyr, St Denis. The manner of Thomas's death prompted a great deal of reflection about the renowned French martyr St Denis and it is recorded in the various 'Lives of Becket' that Thomas called upon his name along with the Virgin Mary, Alphege and the saints of Canterbury in commending his soul to God before his death. Becket's death was therefore linked to the great martyrdoms of the early and universal Church.

Even as early as 840, Carolingian intellectuals were writing of the symbolic significance of church architecture and its surroundings, recognizing that materials had a mystical significance encouraging both memory of the dead and an ascent to the divine. For example, the architectural features of the porch at the entrance to the old basilica at the Abbey of St Denis in Paris were instigated by the Abbot Suger and reflect highly symbolic features. Abbot Suger had been strongly influenced by reading Denys's liturgical and mystical theology concerning the judicious and symbolic use of the material. As a consequence, he demands that the images of the effigies of Jesus be carved in the stone of the columns flanking the doorway, that the scene of the Last Judgement be set on the stone tympanum and those of the Passion and Ascension be carved in the gilded bronze of the doors because 'what is only matter urges the obtuse soul towards the truth, and by the sight of this light raises it from its initial abasement' (quoted in Duby 2000: 34). The real Light comes from Christ, who is the real door to salvation. Abbot Suger also ordered it to be built with the 'aid of the instruments of geometry and arithmetic', so that it would be in harmony with the beauty of the supernatural and later, on designing the chevet, he wished this to be bathed in a light more illuminating than that of Cluny (Duby 2000: 34; Binski 2004). Architectural features, therefore, operated both as a symbolic releases towards the divine and as a channel through which divine Light could shine down upon worshippers. Duby tells us that:

> The work of Suger is the culmination of the monastic innovations of the eleventh century. But, at a stroke, it surpassed them, basing itself on a new theology, revealing as it did, by the image and the architectural scheme, both that *God is light and that he is incarnate*. (2000: 34, my italics)

Medieval liturgy by the eleventh century, therefore, had managed to combine two aspects harmoniously – a deeply interior and immaterial movement to the divine coupled with an exterior material movement to the divine. As Binski contends, 'late-medieval religion is, paradoxically, at once deeply interiorised, immaterial and transcendent, (see St Teresa for an interiorisation and exteriorisation of beauty) and, yet also somatic, body-centred and material in its imagery' (2004: 123).

Symbolic Representations

This symbiotic relationship between Christian formation and the devotional use of the image during the Middle Ages is reflected in the language used. The verb 'to form' in middle High German was *bilden* and the noun was *bilde* or image. Morgan points

out how the fourteenth-century mystic Soso (Eckhart's pupil) referred to the image as a central and indispensable means towards mystical union with God. Such union occurred only after the loss of selfish attachment, whereby the soul was 'superformed' into the bosom of Christ (Morgan 1998: 61), but any such transformation depended on the image acting as a persuasive force. The representation of the crucifix echoes this symbolic and allegorical emphasis in medieval liturgy. In the psalter of Abbot Robert of Lindsey (*circa* 1220) the crucifix reveals a contrast between the white emaciated body of Christ and the green stems showing red and white buds at their tips. The blood of Christ matches the red buds and the white body the white buds. The representation echoes Song of Songs 2:1 and 5:10, demonstrating again the importance of this text for affective contemplation, as in the martyrdom accounts of Thomas Becket. Representations of the cross, (including those within literature) during the thirteenth century in England were never intended to bring about dread. The dominant emotions associated with the crucified Christ were grief, love and nobility and the aesthetic context was that of beauty and *mesure*; the wounds of Christ are worthy of love, visual symbols of his kenotic love, in a similar manner to how his face 'spoke' of love. Christ does not lose his beauty but retains it, albeit disfigured. The emotion of shame came to be associated with the crucifixion, Christ being seen as someone below his social rank, humiliated and poked fun at.

Besides the challenge of showing the significance of Christ's death, the medieval Church encountered a particular dilemma in representing the dead body *per se*, since it had to combine the corruptibility of the body with the belief in the everlasting nature of the soul. When dealing with the dead body, the Church had to handle its inherent ambiguity with sensitivity, since it was a site for a fallen, sensual distraction and a holy, incorruptible phenomenon (Binski 1996: 70). The flesh was inherently fallen due to Adam's sin and yet had the potential to become a glorified body in the afterlife through Christ's saving death on the cross. It therefore dwelt in a boundary space between heaven and earth. As Binski reminds us, 'The medieval body was thus an ambivalent site, in being both Here and Beyond' (1996: 70–71). Medieval tombs reflected this in-between space between the living and the dead. In the light of the growing doctrine about purgatory, especially in the thirteenth century, many became sites for praying for the dead with numerous tombs acting on behalf of the living, giving remission for their time in purgatory in exchange for their prayers for the dead (Binski 2004: 71). Unlike ancient tombs, which were essentially retrospective and which looked back on the biography of the dead person, Christian tombs looked forward to the future state of the living and the dead.

Space given to the dead was a political issue in the Middle Ages since it was a boundary space between heaven and earth, and there was much jostling to be buried in a place which was symbolic of the entry into the next life. Lay burial would occur on the fringes of the church and was therefore situated on the threshold between this life and the next. The medieval word for a porch-space was 'parvis', derived from *paradisum*, which the churchyard was meant to signify (Binski 1996: 74). The spaces for the dead, therefore, gave practical expression to a sense of expectation and desire within an eschatological framework. Spaces near sanctified buildings were boundary spaces, like the liturgy itself, between the visible and the invisible, and church portals, like many ritual spaces, became sites of the Here and the Beyond.

In summary, then, we can claim that during the Middle Ages since sight stimulated the emotions, understanding and memory, imagery became an important and widespread method of encouraging right contemplation and access to God. Whether it was the sight of the tortured body of Christ, the martyr's crown of Becket, the dead body or the drawing of the ark in Victorine spirituality, the movement towards God was as emotional as it was cognitive, as material as it was spiritual, and it was through the judicious use of this symbolic representation that this ascent was able to take place.

Images and the Protestant Reformation

Since visual culture played such an influential role in how Christianity was experienced and perceived, the power and influence of images became a potential threat to the reformers of the sixteenth century. However, it must also not be forgotten that before the religious image became prevalent in the Middle Ages, the Word and doctrinal formulation had invariably been privileged over aesthetic representation and continued to play a significant role in Christianity. A strong view existed from Antiquity that the immaterial and the mental carried more spiritual power and were more capable of transmitting divine revelation than the visible and material. The books known as *Libri Carolini*, which spelled out the reform of the Church during the reign of Charlemagne in the ninth century, described how written texts had the power to pierce the soul through the eye of the mind, whereas visual beauty only penetrated the physical eye (Jantzen 2002: 446). During this time images were not forbidden and, as I have shown, although St John of Damascus was successful to some degree in advocating images through his reference to the *incarnate* Word, many involved in ecclesiastical reform remained suspicious of images and their potentially distracting effect on spiritual progression. I have already mentioned how St Bernard of Clairvaux was one such figure. This suspicion reached its zenith during the European Reformation and sought to persuade people about earlier pre-medieval fears concerning the role of the visual in the Christian life. The proposed return to a more mentalist understanding of faith was not to be an easy one, however, since attempts at visual and aesthetic representation had secured an emotional depth of understanding about the Christian narrative which would not easily be dislodged. Consequently, many who witnessed the Protestant destruction of images became deeply affected and angered since they were much admired and loved. Personal and corporate attachment to sacred iconography was widespread and heartfelt.

Luther criticized the Protestant reformer Karlstadt's approach to the reforms for not paying sufficient attention to those things which were held in believers' hearts and for concentrating on external images instead. Karlstadt 'reversed the order by removing them from sight and leaving them in the heart' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 173). But Karlstadt knew the affective power and influence of images and that is why he was adamant about their destruction. Luther never agreed with his approach to the visual, believing that to have 'images is not wrong' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 130). He was more troubled about their association with his teaching on justification by faith alone, particularly as some believers thought they were doing a good work

by placing images in churches. He argued that images must not be destroyed while at the same time protested against their misuse: 'We must permit the use of images, but preach vigorously against the worst misuse of them' he writes (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 130). He surmised that if a wanton destruction occurs his opponents will accuse him of attacking images rather than their misuse.

Luther disagreed strongly with Karlstadt's ordering of the destruction of images during his absence in Wittenberg since at times they could be used for good purposes. Luther argues that it is surely better to paint images of biblical stories and events on walls rather than be confronted with shameless, worldly things. Besides, it is perfectly natural to form mental images when the Word is heard. When a person hears of Christ he imagines a 'man hanging on a cross' and

> this takes form in my heart … If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes, and should be less stained by sin because it is the true abode and dwelling place of God. (Quoted in Thiessen, 2004: 134)

Images of the crucifixion and the saints were singled out favourably by Luther in the debate since they were meant for memorial and witness: 'And they are not only to be tolerated, but for the sake of the memorial and the witness they are praiseworthy and honourable, as the witness stones of Joshua (Josh 24:26) and of 1 Samuel (1 Sam. 7:12)' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 133). Luther goes on to claim that all that he requests is the use of a crucifix or image of Mary for remembrance, comparing and contrasting the practice to Christ himself who had an image of Caesar: 'Indeed the Caesar had coined his image to glorify himself. However, we seek neither to receive nor give honour in this matter, and are yet so strongly condemned, while Christ's possession of such an abominable and shameful image remains un-condemned' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 133).

For Luther, then, a real danger of images was their potential to construct false images in the heart which had the potential to encourage an internally distorted conception of God. Luther, as I have said, thought Karlstadt had ignored the more important things of the heart. When people understand that faith alone pleases God they will automatically ignore the images before them. But if coercion is used and the teaching about faith undone, they will continue to rely on images and 'Their idea that they can please God with works becomes a real idol and a false assurance in the heart' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 132). But, let us remember, says Luther, that those who do such things 'do not have much to back them up, as unfortunately we have previously realised under our papist tyrants' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 133). The best way is to destroy images with the force of the gospel, the Word which alone offers the way to salvation. This means enlightening the conscience so that it recognizes that it is idolatry to worship images or to trust in them; Christ alone is to be trusted. Zwingli disagreed and preached that the sacred could never be located in any *material or earthly form* and ordered their destruction in the Minster in Zurich in 1524. Sacred space was reserved for heaven alone. Calvin believed images were contrary to Scripture and denied John of Damascus's distinction between *latria* (worship) and *dulia* (veneration). God 'himself is the sole and proper witness of himself' (Thiessen, 2004: 127).

The reformers' attempts to withdraw God from human emotion and cognition had significant consequences:

> For Luther any understanding of the external world as being in the image of Christ was an idolatrous imposition by human beings on a wholly free and sovereign God – a God who owes nothing to us. The notion of seeing creation as an emanation from the source of Beauty (as conceived by Denys) was completely overturned. But the interiorisation of faith which Luther proclaimed in its place, was unable to maintain the mystery of God's sovereignty he so desperately wanted to preserve. (Blond in Heelas, 1998: 289)

This interiorisation Luther and the reformers advocated, based on the abstract and unknowable God, resulted in the loss of God's mystery. (Blond in Heelas 1998: 289). The reformers' attempts to preserve God's mystery resulted in the loss of mystery itself, since no disclosures were allowed. The reforms virtually denuded the external world of any signs of God's beauty and indeed, presence. In contrast, the faith which characterized Denys's theology was not so much a subjective act but rather a mode of recognition (or what some spiritual writers have called an act of discernment) in relation to the beauty creation offered and made manifest. Faith was the seeing of this beauty and its relationship to its source.

Presence and Absence

Although divine beauty within the world as envisaged by Denys and others became attenuated by Augustine's ambivalent attitude and legacy towards beauty, the Catholic Church has throughout its history emphasized the encounter of the sacred in human life and the created order by its doctrine of the analogy of being. This encounter with the divine was accompanied by its understanding of the sacraments involving notions of divine presence and absence. Pope Paul VI contends that a sacrament is 'a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God' (quoted in O'Brien 2000: 9) The efficacious sign in Catholic theology has always been based on the idea that the sign stands for the absence of the signified, but at the same time actually begins to make known the presence of the signified. The sign possesses a *material presence* of that for which it stands. Affirmation is interpenetrated by negation, presence by absence, and reflects an apophatic theology which is at the heart of Catholic sacramentality and liturgy (Davies and Turner 2002). Liturgical and sacramental signs *give expression* to a presence through their symbolic materiality, employed within liturgical forms, but also act as pointers to that which can never fully be revealed. In fact, one might argue the same about liturgical expression that Turner does about the Trinity and Incarnation. Any sharing in the love of God is 'a darkness … which for the Christian is deepened, not relieved by the Trinity, intensified by the Incarnation, not dispelled' (2002: 30).

The Protestant world, in contrast, became largely a secular sphere devoid of God's presence in which a personal testimony of faith was necessary for salvation. This contrasted with the Catholic view that spiritual formation was possible through the development of an intimate relationship between God and humanity (Hampson 2001). Aquinas uses the phrase *amor amicitiae* to describe the intimate and close

relationship between the divine and the human. It is a love between brothers and the process of redemption begins in us now as we live our daily lives, always in relation to the divine: 'Grace is nothing else than a kind of beginning in glory in us' (quoted in Hampson 2001: 85). This movement releases a process of divinization as human endeavour and freely offered grace work together in transforming the self, a understanding of redemption Pope Pius XII observes in his phrase, 'Grace and glory are two stages of the one process of divinisation' (quoted in Hampson 2001: 85). There is always a two-way action between God and humanity and in Catholic understanding something can be offered from the human side to God (2001: 92). Hampson writes: 'The Latin mass is a sacrifice which it is possible for the human to bring to God. For Luther such an offering would simply be a work; one which did not allow God to do his work' (2001: 94).

Protestantism had little time for the notion of divinization or deification – one must simply turn to Christ and repent. It is more important to have faith rather than to have love for God. In offering a spirituality of 'seeing' and visibility rather than a faith about hearing the Word of the invisible God, Catholicism encouraged an emphasis on self-transformation in relation to God. As Hampson comments in her analysis of the structures of Catholic and Lutheran thinking,

> in a religion based on sight or straining after the vision, what is important is my seeing eyes. It is I who reach further into reality as I cultivate my own spirituality … In a religion of hearing I am given new ground on which to stand and I rejoice. Catholicism speaks by contrast of the need to control myself and to work at transformational change. These are two very different religious sensibilities. (2001: 287)

The emphasis on faith, beliefs and justification by Protestantism inevitably entailed a shrinkage in the importance placed upon desire and beauty, which had dominated access to the divine in the pre-modern era. As Jantzen contends, 'The emphasis on beliefs and their justification in Protestant theology and philosophy of religion almost completely obscures consideration of beauty and its centrality in inspiring and focusing longing and desire' (2004: 40). Generally speaking, the Reformation tended to collapse the difference between iconolatry and idolatry (Jay 1993: 42). The aesthetic dimension of liturgy which sought to re-awaken and draw participants into a movement of desire and intimacy began to fade as the Reformation and its new forms of worship took hold. The consequences were far reaching: beauty became largely unimportant and then much worse – potentially an obstacle to faith.

The Feeling for Protestantism

Interestingly, however, recent work on the means by which the new theology and worship of the Protestant reformers attempted to persuade the mass of the people of its authenticity has focussed on the power of its expressive mode, indicating that the arts were not so easily abandoned and continued to be a formidable force in communicating Christianity. The question asked by Pettegree is an apt one for our discussion: 'But precisely what *moved* [my emphasis] people – either as individuals, or as part of a community – to abandon one allegiance and embrace another is

a complex and difficult question' (2005: 1). What was it that tempted people to move to another religious world, away from their own deeply engrained medieval understanding of faith and culture?

For Luther, allegiance to the new form of Christianity entailed an acceptance of a call for repentance, but how was this to be conveyed to the people? Although Protestantism became the religion of the Book, it is a mistake to transfer into the period modern notions about reading, especially reading alone: 'In the early modern world most information was conveyed in public, communal settings: the market place, the church, a proclamation from the town hall steps' (Pettegree 2005: 8). Preaching, music, drama, image and the use of pamphlets all played a significant part. Communal singing was highly influential in the first evangelical period. Songs were able to stir up the heart and were part of every life in the homes, labour and domestic arrangements of the time. Luther himself had a great love of music which invariably lifted his depression. Karlstadt, in contrast, saw no advantage in the arts. He thought that plainsong should be translated in order to allow Christ to live in the heart. Luther, in contrast, believed that the young should be trained in music and other fine arts so as to wean them away from love ballads and to allow them to see that what is good can be combined with what is pleasing (Pettegree 2005: 45).

Drama, too, played its part in the process of reform. Luther referred to plays as paintings (*Gemalde*), pictures (*Bild*), or even (following Cicero), as a mirror (Pettegree 2005: 81). Theatre became useful in exploiting the medieval dramatic culture for its own conversion purpose as authors began to share their work with themes dominant in Protestantism. This combination had more emotional power than the broadsheet since it brought together image, song and action. Drama in the first generation after the Reformation followed an overtly didactic line, however. Woodcut art also proved important at the beginning of the sixteenth century but these were not as influential as some earlier historians had suggested due to the 'blunted sight' of many observers. Often complex images were accompanied by an explanatory text and their social reach was limited to the well educated and the well sighted. What became more significant were 'badges of belonging', which often had inscribed on them portraits of Luther or biblical themes or characters, particularly, Abraham, Isaac, or Christ with the Samaritan woman.

Since images were again becoming such a contested site for debate, the Council of Trent defined their proper use of images in its 25th session in December 1563, reiterating the importance of the representation of Christ, Mary and the saints:

> The sacred bodies of the holy martyrs and of the other saints living with Christ, which have been living members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16), and which are destined to be raised and glorified by Him unto eternal life, should also be venerated by the faithful. (Quoted in Thiessen 2004: 143)

Due adoration and veneration are to be given because the honour which is shown to them referred to the original subjects which they represent.

> Thus, through the images which we kiss and before which we kneel and uncover our heads, we are adoring Christ and venerating the saints whose likeness these images bear.

That is what was defined by the decrees of the Councils, especially the second Council of Nicaea, against the opponents of images. (Quoted in Thiessen 2004: 143)

For Calvin, in contrast, physical blindness was beneficial since it enforced absolute attention on the voice of God in Scripture (Jay 1993: 43). His attitude to what he considered the absurd claims of the Council of Nicaea are set forth in the text, 'under the name of Charlemagne', which accused members of the Council of twisting the verses of Scripture to suit their own ends. 'In short, so disgusting are their absurdities that I am ashamed even to mention them' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 142). Calvin argues 'God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 137). Quoting Exodus 20:4 he comments, 'By these words he restrains our waywardness from trying to represent him by any visible image, and briefly enumerates all those forms from trying to represent him by any visible image, and briefly enumerates all those forms by which superstition long ago began to turn his truth into falsehood' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 137). For Calvin and Zwingli the image was tantamount to manipulating the original to which it pointed, who remained sovereign in heaven. Calvin believed images were means of extracting favours from God and a way of manipulating Him for utilitarian goals (Morgan 1998: 65).

Duffy's account of the parish of Morebath makes the same point about the division between Church and society after the Reformation (2001). He reminds us that churches before the Protestant Reformation were filled with beautiful and poignant images which served as devotional aids. The figures of the Virgin and St George were obligatory for every church. And particularly prevalent were images of the saints and, at the foot of the cross, of Our Lady of Pity, Mary, who became associated with death and bereavement. Prayers of petition and intercession were common in the Catholic Church because no distinction was made between the living and the dead and their liturgies quite naturally included calling upon the saints. Consequently, images of saints served not only as devotional forms reminding parishioners of the central beliefs of the Church, but as Holy Helpers linked to everyday needs and struggles (Duffy 2001: 73) With the reform measures of 1536, many of the religious festivals were abolished and, since these were social as well as religious events, the collective and bonding role of religion became severely reduced. Cromwell required all clergy to preach the Supremacy and berated all pilgrimages and images, stating that 'it shall profit more their soul's health, if they do bestow that on the poor and needy, which they would have bestowed upon the said images or relics' (Duffy 2001: 91).

Morebath's bishop, Yeysey of Exeter, was responsible for promoting the idea within popular Christianity, that images were simply a concession to people's 'dullness' and 'paganism'. Teaching about images was to be found in the second commandment, which was against the worship of images and was contained in a new book entitled *Institution of the Christian Man*. Duffy (2001) suggests that some of the most ferocious attacks of the Reformation were centred on the cult of images. Feigned images and symbols were to be taken down, thereby avoiding the sin of idolatry. Conservatives claimed that such injunctions simply meant storing the images out of sight but evangelicals like Archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Shaxton

were intent on their wholesale destruction. The extinguishing of the lights of the Morebath church gives stark testimony to the impact the reforms were having.

This shift was part of a wider transformation. What became important for Protestants was personal belief, interiorized faith, purity of the heart and most importantly, Scripture. The embodied nature of Christianity in which the sacred was manifest in the created order and made 'material' by the Church through its sacramental rites and devotional practices, became largely an individualized, abstract operation, frequently divorced from society at large. 'From now on society … becomes a *thing* to be wary of by religious-minded people … this transformation of "Christianity" from a body of people to a body of beliefs was intimately tied to the process of abstraction surrounding the notion of "society" following its cleavage from "religion"' (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 119). Even the social concerns of Calvin reflected this understanding; society was no longer a group of like-natured men and women bound together by the rituals of the Church and their common potentiality for transcendence, but a disparate collection of individuals to be converted by the grace of God. The cosmos of medieval times, which was an open book of beauty waiting to be 'read', was replaced by an understanding of creation as a 'thing'. And as a consequence, earlier understandings of creation singing God's praise were rendered meaningless. There were no Augustinian 'signs' outside the Scriptures; there were to be no physical aids to access the invisible; the disenchantment of nature had begun. Creation was a redundant means for reaching up towards God, for God was sovereign and above humankind and the created order. Beauty and God had been banished from the world.

During the Middle Ages the Christian vision of the spiritual dimensions of life was secured by the symbolic ordering of society and its ritual underpinnings. As Mellor and Shilling write,

> In the medieval view, then, the transcendental conditions of human togetherness were expressed in explicitly theological terms: society was a human temporal phenomenon, but was also an arena for the development of human sociality and morality that was infused with the divine grace mediated through the 'spiritual' estate of the church. (1997: 118)

It was the spiritual dimension which was of greater value, but this infused the temporal realm, transforming it into a Christian society dedicated to charity and solidarity. What happened at the Protestant Reformation was that religion became transmuted into an essentially psychological phenomenon, a private enterprise split off from the corporate worship and social unity such practices encouraged. A radical shift in the relationship between religion and society occurred after the Reformation, 'From this point on, however intently individuals may have believed in their religion, the medieval consciousness of the links between Christianity and society, spirituality and temporality, tended to fade from view, or, at least, become much more problematic' (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 119). But this was not the end of the story: 'It is important to remember that the divorce between religion and society is a culturally specific notion and that the religion/society divide is unsustainable theoretically' (1997: 130), as the example of New England Puritanism demonstrates in its return to a form of sacramentalism, having previously been hostile towards ideas of sacred space (1997: 130).

Images and Sacred Space: The Reformation, Liturgy and Beauty

Morgan's study of the history of popular religious images has indicated, however, that many Protestants in some instances *did* avail themselves of some devotional images, although they frequently felt the need to 'excuse' such uses with prefaced statements or disclaimers about the distinction between the worship of God and worship of the picture (1998: 181). They sensed an unease about their use and deployment. Recalling many of the iconoclastic arguments of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Protestants were generally wary of the passage in Exodus 20:4 and fearful of idolatry creeping into their worship of God. The arts generally became separated from religion as Protestantism no longer needed the assistance of the aesthetic to teach the mysteries of the faith (Jay 1993).

Morgan argues that Protestantism, in contrast to Catholicism, became less concerned about identifying the sacred with notions of space and more concerned about its dynamic within time. He argues that the concept of the sacred space (and therefore the significance of seeing) applies to more highly liturgical forms of Christianity as Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Episcopalianism, Lutheranism and Eastern Orthodoxy all of which are rooted in a view of the sacrament of the altar as the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus (1998: 182). For many Protestants, by contrast, the architecture of the sacred is one of time. Conservative Protestantism indicates that the religious image is valued and used, but primarily as an individual aid to remembering: 'Pictorial images that appeal to time in the form of memory do not confuse sign and referent and therefore escape proscription among even the most iconoclastic Protestants' (1998: 192). The image of Christ for Protestantism is conveyed to the mind through the Scriptures or, as one respondent said, images rest 'in the heart'. The crucial difference between Protestantism in this regard from other Christian denominations is summarized well by Morgan: 'God's immediacy in prayer, worship, or devotion is understood as a personal relationship mediated by the *mental rather than material* image of Jesus' (1998: 194). It became a far more internalized and private activity, removed from the Catholic emphasis on the embodied and public nature of worship.

The Reformation, Puritanism and the Rise of the Early Modern Period

Inevitably, after the Reformation a more cognitive approach to faith began to appear. *Sympathetic* rather than empathetic response to the life of Christ during the early modern period became common. The notion of the saint as wonder worker was replaced by that of the moral exemplar. One of the most influential discussions of sympathy during the eighteenth century was given by Adam Smith at the start of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Davies 2001: 236). Influenced by the Stoic tradition, which used sympathetic feeling in the creation of social bonds (Davies 2001: 236), Smith suggests we must enter into another's suffering by imaginative *thinking* (Davies 2001: 236). One of the most popular devotional books of the nineteenth century was Francis de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life*, in which it is shown that medieval empathy was largely replaced by *sympathy* as the response of God or

the saints to human predicament. Empathy had always drawn the believer into the embodied suffering of Christ; sympathy, in contrast, became the force that 'moved the saint or Virgin or God to work on a believer's behalf' (Morgan 1998: 74). The direct emotional and somatic embrace of the suffering Christ during the medieval period was substituted for a sympathetic response from above. Personal connectedness was replaced by intercessional distance.

With the advent of Puritanism, a further approach to faith developed. The Puritans based their fastidious consciousness of the soul partly on St Augustine's notion of the invisible and visible Church, in which he makes a distinction between the perfection of the heavenly Church and the imperfection of earthly Church. But they wanted as far as possible to establish a perfect Church here and now. At first they demanded little more than a rejection of the Church of England and a basic, formulaic creed but later they saw themselves as a set of 'true believers' separate from others and, as a consequence, a far greater scrutiny of an individual's worth for membership became necessary and apparent (Campbell, 1987: 128). Looking for signs of saving grace was an attempt to establish this perfect group even though it was known and accepted that signs could never be wholly determinative of salvation (only God knew this). But the Puritans did claim that they could give an approximation of faith and reasons for candidature in their new separatist group.

Campbell argues that two strands of Puritan 'emotionalism' – sympathetic kindliness associated with the cult of benevolence and self-pitying morbidity linked to the excesses of Calvinism – resulted in a meeting of minds due to their association with the pleasures of feeling (1987: 135). Such a state was combined with a Puritan 'empathy whereby sympathetic leanings also entailed some absorption of unwanted pain. This became the basis for the rise of Sentimentalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries 'where pity and self-pity became interchangeable' (Campbell 1987: 135). During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sympathy became the hallmark of evangelical religious practice. As I have already noted, the medieval notion of empathy was radically different from this evangelical response. If medieval 'feeling' entailed an embodied identification, as far as possible, with the object, then sympathy entailed a likeness between oneself and another, a correspondence and resemblance (Morgan 1998: 78–93), but one which secured a distance which remained intact since the emotions were never fully engaged. This 'passionless' and non-sensual experience was also linked to the promotion of domestic and social order and was strongly encouraged in the American Tract Society, where feelings began to be regulated according to social convention in relation to benevolence and pity.

It was not surprising in the light of this social regulation of feeling that 'appropriate' amusement was discussed at length, with the theatre, dance and the reading of novels being discouraged lest they evoke the 'wrong' kind of feelings. But what was more noticeable was the association of sympathy with inequality and inferiority – animals, the poor or domestic servants becoming the concern of fervent evangelicals who, by taming their passions into socially accepted forms of sympathy, looked down with benevolent pity on those less important than themselves (Morgan 1998: 86). Indeed, a person's ethical sensibility was judged by the treatment of such 'others'. A guide to assessing an individual's sensibility was also closely linked to the notion

of 'aesthetic taste' or 'sense of beauty.' For example, the test of one's appreciation of nature was judged according to the discernment of the 'picturesque', a term much in vogue during the 1870s and 1880s. Clearly, the medieval embodied, empathetic involvement of the sensual as a 'natural' part of religious practice had been replaced by the Puritan disembodied, polite and socially constructed condescension of sympathy, with some distinct consequences for the practice and understanding of Christianity. However, sympathy did not promote the loss of the self in any kind of emotional extreme; instead it called for the controlled investment of feeling in the spiritual welfare of the less fortunate. Sympathy avoided pain and suffering as the experience of one's relationship to God because it did not posit an identity between the self and God.

Good works were not a sign of salvation since the damned could clearly involve themselves in such matters. Therefore, candidates were forced to give a public recital of the manner in which grace had been given to them and, as early as 1640, this came into regular practice in New England in America and then later into Britain. The inner experience became the litmus test for true belief and a guarantee of real 'evangelical humiliation', to use one of Jonathan Edwards's phases from *Religious Affections*. But along with this there developed a self-scrutinizing obsession with the inner workings of the soul and a psychology of sin and regeneration which brought about a body of literature aimed at encouraging people to 'cure' their own souls (Campbell 1987).

Jonathan Edwards: True and Untrue Religion

We can see how this Puritan understanding of religion operated with respect to worship by examining some of the ideas of the eighteenth-century American Calvinist, Jonathan Edwards. But in order to clarify his position, we need to summarize his ideas about the role of the 'affections' in religion. Edwards was keen to distinguish between a religion which is true and one which is false – in fact, he wrote 450 pages on distinguishing true from false signs of religion in his treatise entitled *Religious Affections*. It is important, he claimed, to recognize 'true religion' which lies in the affection of the heart (Edwards 1974: 1.1.1) Jesus was *par excellence* the person with an affectionate heart and his virtuous life was expressed through this exercise. God's Word, too, 'insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, "fervent in spirit" and our hearts are vigorously engaged in religion. Rom 12:II' (1974: 1.11.1).

Edwards contended that, until this division between true and false religion is established, the flourishing of religion will be cut short. He himself was a leading preacher and exponent of the evangelical First Great Awakening in America and believed that, while there are no certain signs of God's salvific grace, there are religious affections which come about through faith and are discernible. He argues that affections are 'vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination' and 'The will and the affections of the soul are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will; nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and the inclination of the soul, but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise' (1974: 1.1). Significantly, passions are different and potentially dangerous: these are more

sudden and their 'effects on the animal spirits are more violent, and the mind more overpowered, and less in its own command' (1974: 1.1).

For Edwards, involvement in worship is essential to the development of such religious affections and all true religion should engender someone fervent in spirit related to the affections of the heart. Baptism, for example, has the power to release in the heart a burning, since it is set on fire by the Holy Spirit of 'powerful holy affection.' Prayer and hymn singing, too, affect the heart. Indeed, this is their purpose: 'the duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections' (1974: 1.11.9). God, taking note of our frame, has not only told us of the great things of the gospel but also of the sacraments which are 'exhibited to our view, in sensible representations … the more to affect us with them' (1974: 1.11.9). Edwards warned that those Christians who had turned against those things which stir affections were on the wrong road, since the preaching of the Word, and the administration of ordinances, 'and such a way of worshipping God in prayer arouse the affections and are to be desired' (1974: 1.11.9).

> How can they sit and hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length and breadth of the love of God in Jesus … his bloody sweat, his loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved eternal burnings … and yet be cold, and heavy, insensible and regardless? (1974: 1.11.9)

Clearly then, Edwards endorses those forms of worship which arouse feeling and enthusiasm for God, but he has a major obstacle to overcome if he decides to locate the affections in the body, since the corporeal and fleshy was for him always a site for temptation, sensual carnality and sinfulness. He believed that the body was often moved by satanic forces and was a site for corruption, infected by the passions and influenced by the unruliness of the body. Such ideas 'have nothing in them which is spiritual and divine' but arise from the 'weakness of the body and mind, and distempers of body' and turn 'the divine nature in the soul, into mere animal' (quoted in Morgan 1998: 74). The soul, not the body is moved in worship:

> The body of man is no more capable of being really the subject of love or hatred, joy or sorrow, fear or hope, than the body of a tree … Nor are these motions of the animal spirits, and fluids of the body, anything properly belonging to the nature of the affections, though they always accompany them, in the present state. (Edwards 1974 1.1)

However, Edwards was also aware that the affections could clearly have effects upon the body, but these were no sure guide of the reliability of a holy heart, since temporal things may affect the body in a similar manner. He contends that so 'subject is the body to the mind, and so much do its fluids especially the animal spirits, attend the motions and exercises of the mind, that there cannot be so much as an intense thought, without an effect upon them' (1974: 1.1). But religious affections never arise in the body but are always located in the mind. When describing the beauty of violets he declares, 'Thus we find ourselves pleased in beholding the colour of the violets, but we know not what secret regularity or harmony it is that creates pleasure in our *minds*' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 172, my italics).

As a consequence of this position, Edwards denounced Catholic practices which used images because they increased the passions (as opposed to affections) and disrupted the mind to produce 'imaginary ideas', i.e., false conceptions of the divine. While he claimed that God had given humanity the faculty of the imagination and its use was necessary when thinking about spiritual and invisible things, he maintained that the imagination was 'subservient and helpful to the other faculties of the mind, when a proper use is made of it; though often, when the imagination is strong, and the other faculties are weak, it overbears, and disturbs them in their exercise' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 173). This mistrust of the imagination was also related to his view about the Catholic abuse of images: 'The image of Christ, which men conceive in their imagination, is not in its own nature, of any superior kind to the idea that the papists conceive of Christ …' (quoted in Farley 2001: 75). And on the impact of the crucifixion he warns, 'Some have had ideas of Christ's hanging on the cross, and his blood running from his wounds; and this they call a spiritual sight of Christ crucified, and the way of salvation by his blood', but these 'have nothing in them which is spiritual and divine' but arise from the 'weakness of the body and mind, and distempers of body' and turn 'the divine nature in the soul, into mere animal' (quoted in Morgan 1998: 74). As Mellor and Shilling note in their evaluation of the separation between the mind and the body in Protestantism, such 'Cognitive apprehension assumes that valid knowledge is gained from mental activity freed from bodily prejudices of emotions …' (1997: 58).

Edwards's consideration of beauty reflects this internalized heart-centred understanding of faith. True believers are known by a disinterested, selfless appeal to God's beauty. For Edwards, primary beauty consists in the cultivation of a disposition of benevolence to what exists. He writes in *True Virtue*, 'If it (true virtue) has its seat in the heart, and is the general goodness and beauty of the disposition and its exercise … what can it consist in, but a consent and good will to being in general' (quoted in Farley 2001: 49). Beauty operates on the will and the heart and it is God's saving grace which enables us to perceive beauty. What a truly religious person experiences of the beauty of God is better termed a 'sensation' and this new religious 'sense' is written about in his *A Divine and Supernatural Light*. It is an immediate grasp of the beauty of God's work of redemption by the heart. Again, as with his *Religious Affections* Edwards demonstrates his characteristic stance that religion is never without some stirring of the 'affections', but he is highly suspicious of any kind of emotionalism which rests solely on individual testimonies of extraordinary experiences which can never be totally relied upon (Schroder in Hastings et al. 2000: 194). Edwards challenged, therefore, Catholic and some Puritan taste for strong religious emotions by giving rational criteria for judging their worth.

Having said all this, Edwards does have an overriding regard for a theology of beauty, but insists on an internalized understanding which is manifest in the mind and the exercise of the disposition. Beauty accompanies all true religious feelings and states of goodwill, but the most perfect form is a heart which is disposed towards being in a kind of contemplative benevolence, responding to the world and others with selfless goodness. The nearest Edwards gets to a bodily or mystical element in his writings is when he states that when someone is able to contemplate the beauty of God she is simultaneously able to reflect the divine light back to its source; he

does use the expression 'union with God' in his 'Concerning the End for which God created the World' in *Two Dissertations*.

Edwards also offers an account of where beauty might be found in a *Miscellany* entitled *Excellency of Christ*. The created order of the rivers and meadows reflect the 'sweet benevolence of Christ' and also suggests that the image of the beautiful Christ rests within the human soul (Sherry 2002: 14). Christ's work of redemption is to beautify. But Edwards does not allow the arts to manifest beauty (Farley 2001: 44). He relocates the concept firmly in the movements of the heart. Radically different in tone to his famous sermon 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' (in which he suggests that our fate is rather like that of a spider being held precariously over a fire), he insists that the primary attribute of God is beauty, a beauty reflected in creation. He devotes his essay on the Trinity to an analysis of the function of the Holy Spirit – the Father and Son breathe forth the Spirit and our communion with God consists in our partaking of that same Spirit. The Spirit both beautifies and sanctifies the created order as well as offering comfort to God's people.

As I have indicated earlier, this understanding of religion is clearly at odds with the communal, embodied experience of beauty and the spiritual life offered by the Church in the Middle Ages. Edwards's approach is symptomatic of those Protestants who locate discussions of Christianity within an internalized recognition of saving grace and who argue strongly for the role of introspection and self-examination in the spiritual life. Indeed, the diary or spiritual autobiography became extremely popular at this time and the duty of committing oneself self-reflectively to paper became a kind of internalized cognitive confession, replacing the institutionally sanctioned public experience of sorrow and repentance common during the Middle Ages. Diaries became the means for recording an individual's noble and, more commonly, despicable deeds (Morgan 1998; Mellor and Shilling 1997). But even such testimonies could never affect their ultimate destiny since, as Haller contends, what became involved was 'a drama which moved to its predetermined end according to a law they could do no more than marvel at. But the theatre of that drama was the human breast, and their own fate right up to the deathbed scene hung upon its outcome' (quoted in Campbell 1987: 131). With the promotion of this trajectory of internalization and self-preoccupation, a melancholy disposition frequently characterized a Puritan psychology, a logical development from a distinctive form of introspection which was to be influential long after the decline of Calvinism, as the eighteenth-century movements of sensibility and Romanticism took root.

Chapter 4

The Movement of Desire

In the previous chapter I discussed how the use of images in liturgy, particularly in the pre-modern world, encouraged a movement of ascent towards the divine and suggested how such a phenomenology of anagogical worship rested partly upon its capacity to communicate 'another place' which worshippers sought. Religious images, as imaginative and beautiful representations of the Christian faith, reminded ritual participants of the implications of the saving power of Christ (and the saints) for their own lives and served more than an illustrative function. They embodied a *revelatory expression* of faith, which sought to resonate affectively with and strengthen the faith of worshippers, a theme I pursue in more depth in Chapter 6. At the same time, the aesthetic features which surrounded acts of praise and adoration situated worshippers in a boundary space between the known and unknown, the visible acting as a seductive and enticing expression of another invisible place and way of being to which they witnessed. In so doing, ritual spaces, through their judicious use of the material, became the mysterious borderline between two worlds and reminded individuals who they were and the place to which they ultimately belonged. It is worth noting here that for Orthodox Christianity, images actually possess a redemptive presence and carry a power equal to Scripture. As Leonid Ouspensky comments, 'the icon contains and proclaims the same truth as the Gospel. Like the Gospel and the Cross, it is one of the aspects of divine revelation …' (quoted in Viladesau 2000: 140; see also Binns 2002: 97–106).

In this chapter I focus further discussion on this revelatory function of liturgy with particular reference to its expression of beauty in relation to a trajectory of desire. The arguments developed in this chapter seek to demonstrate that beauty's enrapturing presence is crucial to the movement of ascent that I articulate throughout the book. For Eastern Christianity there can never be any substantive theology which does not entail an account and experience of beauty (George 1994: 19); its celebration is at the heart of its liturgy. In so far as worship is beautiful, it invokes the divine as the object of worshippers' desire, becoming an arena where the imagination is lifted towards an ineffable Beauty, the source of all that is. As Durkheim knew, ritual 'makes men forget the real world so as to transport them into another where their imagination is more at home' (1995: 384). Beauty is one of the primary ways of securing this transportation and imaginative encounter with 'another place', where the presence of the Eternal becomes manifest as worshippers ceaselessly journey, within doxological spaces, to the heavenly altar of God, an infinitely unlimited and beckoning horizon.

Beauty Beckons

The importance of light in connection with such notions of desire and beauty was well established in the patristic and medieval periods; indeed light was considered to be the most beautiful of things (Kirwan 1999: 57) since it emanated from a divine source. Although beauty might be said to be more of a Hellenistic rather than a biblical concept, the creation of the world, according to Genesis, first appeared as light, with its harmony and beauty being attributed to its origin in light (Kirwan 1999: 142; Avis 1989). What the medieval Church, in particular, recognized was that their architectural settings for liturgy often had the apparatus and means of reflecting this light to assist in the creation of a form of beauty. Liturgical arenas were, at best, therefore, ritual spaces of *de-light*, in which worshippers experienced rays of light as emanating from the One Divine Light – the two worlds of the visible and invisible linked by a *natural and supernatural* phenomenon. The space liturgy occupied was one of enlightened beauty.

In turn, light was also associated with the notion of 'form'. According to St Thomas Aquinas, the radiance of beauty is the splendour of form (Saward 1997: 43), which becomes a 'sure light' or glory of 'being' susceptible to the senses. A 'form' was a kind of ray emanating from the brilliant Wisdom and Beauty of the Creator (Saward 1997: 45), which became embedded in the created order's sense of mystery, beauty and goodness. As Maritain puts it, a form was 'the ontological secret that (things) bear within them … their operating mystery … above all the proper principle of intelligibility, the proper *clarity* of every thing … a vestige or ray of the creative intelligence at the heart of created being' (quoted in Dubay 1999: 50).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the worship of the Church during the Middle Ages was considered to have the potential to express God's beauty through its configuration of light, space and beauty. In order to manifest the indescribable depth and beauty of revelation therefore, a form of liturgy which did justice to that revelation was required. Consequently, the liturgist had a role analogous to the artist, responsible for the creation of a performance of beauty, praise and adoration, which would enrapture and lift worshippers towards an ineffable Beauty, the archetypal Artist of light. The beauty that flowed from the Creator–Artist God made humanity wonder at this divine artistry and handiwork: 'Who would not marvel at this Artisan', at the One 'who is light and in whom there is no darkness?' asks Nicholas of Cusa (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 110). Praise becomes the natural response to such revelation, for it is precisely because humanity has seen, according to the tenth-century Byzantine mystic, Symeon, the New Theologian, 'a small ray of light' that they 'in wonderment and fear … celebrate Me in song' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 113).

Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Artists* (1999), addresses this theme when he refers to all those artists who are concerned to express beauty. The 'spiritual attraction' of religious images allows a movement of ascent to take place towards the invisible: 'Sacred images are honoured by the Faithful so that by means of a visible face, our spirit may be carried in a spiritual attraction towards the invisible majesty of the Divinity' (1999: 1). Artists, therefore, are involved in the mystery and beauty of creation in a particular way, since their artistic gifts are able to echo 'the mystery

of creation with which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished in some way to associate you' (1999: 1). Quoting the Polish Romantic poet, Cyprian Norwid, he argues that 'beauty is to enthuse us to work, and work is to raise us up' (1999: 3); beauty has a means of recovering a world of goodness and is 'the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty' (1999: 3). The Greeks coined the term *kalokagathia* or beauty–goodness to express this connection. Such insights into the nature of artistic endeavour and its association with goodness and beauty reflect something of Dostoevsky's claim in *The Idiot* that, 'Beauty will save the world'. In the *Letter to Artists*, Pope John Paul II writes that in their concern for beauty artists offer 'a call to transcendence' through their appeal to mystery:

> In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which arises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption. (1999: 10)

Beauty is the key to this mystery and 'call'. It is an invitation 'to savour life and to dream of the future' (1999: 16). Artistic endeavours, therefore, serve the attainment of truth, goodness and beauty and, like liturgy, offer a new way of being and perceiving the world.

The liturgical endeavour, therefore, like the artistic, has the potential to create and *per-form* a narrative of beauty and, paradoxically, an expression of the invisible through social means. Flanagan is right to comment that through the 'aura of beauty and holiness which is cultivated by the spatial arrangements and stylised movement, gestures and clothing', it becomes possible in liturgy 'to discover the invisible through social means' (Flanagan 1990: 76). The condensed and formalized world of liturgy allows something mysterious to be revealed through the symbolic materiality of the rite. By means of the intensity of its aesthetic and ritualized representation it brings about a mysterious disclosure of divine beauty. Such disclosures are only made possible by the creation of a structured form suited to the task. As Küng reminds us, in quoting from Guardini, the mystery of existence is always contained within the confines of a highly structured and material context which encourages the imagination to respond:

> The tree on the campus is not outside in the field. It is not 'there' at all, but is placed, seen, felt, as filled with the mystery of existence within the confines of the representation. The painter has given form to it in his vision and expressed his image in the external structure of lines and colours on the canvas in such a way that it can also emerge in the imagination of the person who contemplates this structure. (Quoted in Schmit 2004: 12)

The structured intensity of liturgy allows worshippers to be transported to the world represented, encouraging them to live according to its values.

Von Balthasar suggests that worship depends less on 'the individual word' and more 'on the whole procedure in which forms are evolved' (1995: 16). Once liturgy's form is made real, then the development of a person's Christian form is possible; indeed, 'to be a Christian is precisely a form … the Christian will realise his mission only if he truly becomes this form which has been willed and instituted

by Christ' (von Balthasar 1989: 28), and, 'When it is achieved, Christian form is the most beautiful thing that may be found in the human realm' (1989: 28), a precious pearl which forces one to dismiss all else as rubbish. Becoming enraptured by seeing Christ and other forms of beauty requires, however, a contemplative approach to existence which at times entails becoming 'fools' in the eyes of the world. Many might scorn such contemplative seeing and 'will attempt to explain their state in terms of psychological or even physiological laws (Acts 2.13)' (1989: 33). But this does not matter to them. They possess an attitude towards beauty which calls forth a pneumatic existence, because Christ's uniqueness is revealed to them and as a result they, like the Apostles, are cast 'down to adoration' (1989: 33). Beauty's form, therefore, leads both to Christian formation and to a feeling of homage to the source of that beauty. Nichols says the same thing when referring to Christ's own *leitourgia* of the Father: 'From a thing's form is its beauty' and 'the form of the Liturgy is furnished by the form of Christ himself in his Pasch, since what the Church celebrates in her worship is Christ's divine–human *leitourgia* of the Father (Do this in memory of me) for our salvation' (1999: 28).

Consequently, the Church's challenge is to create a form of liturgy which reflects Beauty's form, freeing the creative interplay between the created order and 'another place', primarily through its configuration of light, space, aesthetics and ritual. But in order to understand this dynamic more clearly we need to trace carefully those early and contemporary writers who have made *beauty and its form* their central concern and that is why I now turn to the influential third-century philosopher, Plotinus.

Plotinus

The philosopher Plotinus (205–70 CE) has become one of the most respected and influential writers on the nature of beauty. Although he never understood the created order as in any sense a 'gift', and consequently never offered any hint of praise or adoration to an ultimate source of beauty which might lie beyond material forms, the central purpose of his philosophy was to investigate the worlds of intellect and sense as ultimately one (Bredin and Santoro-Brienza 2000: 46–51). The task of life and the attainment of happiness will only come about if human beings are able to see everything as a *whole*, including the one who sees. His writings largely explore and encourage this vision by focussing on the body, soul, life and beauty. Like many philosophers before him, a central question in relation to such reflections was: What brings about real happiness?

Plotinus was immensely influential on his contemporary and later Christian writers. Indeed, Kirwan argues that Plotinus's 'more or less direct heir in the non-pagan world is Dionysius the Areopagite' for whom God is the '"Attractive Power" which moves all things simply by being desired by them, as fire warms without itself feeling warm' (1999: 29). This is an important point since, unlike Augustine, Plotinus claimed that there was no sharp division between the creator and creation. He believed, like Denys, that creation is a divine emanation flowing from the One and that all things as a result participate in this source. As Jantzen notes, 'There is

thus a sense, for Plotinus, as there is not for Augustine, that all that exists down to the humblest pebble or blade of grass partakes of the divine' (2002: 438).

Plotinus himself never practised a religion and had little involvement with organized religion, but he did claim to have had regular experience of the divine (Miles 1999: 142). He began to write at the age of 50 after studying for 11 years in Alexandria, and he then went on an expedition with the Roman military to the East, after which he returned to Rome to enjoy court patronage and a life of teaching; but his strenuous attempts to create a 'city of philosophers' were never realized due to the Emperor's advisors' resistance. The universe Plotinus envisaged is one formed and enlivened by spirit. All bodies, including rocks and soil, are given life by this and each entity is part of a hierarchical structure which gives being and form to the entity below it. Although the image of the ladder conveys the notion Plotinus is keen to give, his thinking is best served by concentrating on the sides of the ladder, which allows free movement interdependently between the various entities and energies. His goal was to encourage each person to identify with the soul which gives life to the body and is intrinsically connected to it. This, he says, should not be too difficult an endeavour since human beings cannot find rest in the fragmentation of ordinary life. Indeed, everyone has a natural inclination to find the source of all unity. As Bredin and Santoro-Brienza comment, 'We carry within ourselves a deep nostalgia for the infinite and perfect unity that is our ultimate source' (2000: 46). The soul naturally yearns for an ascent higher than the mere level of intellectual activity, ultimately desiring a return to its 'divine' source. In contrast to beauty is ugliness, which is not in accordance with the soul and does not have 'form' or pattern. The aim of life is to see beyond the political and social and to attain union with the One, the source of all goodness and beauty; indeed, to become 'divine' by unity with the One for which one most longs and yearns.

Jantzen argues, I think rightly, that although Plotinus did focus on the beauty of everyday living, he was not primarily concerned with this life of bodily existence but with the life of contemplation and life after death, believing that the contemplative person actually brings eternity forward and participates in the eternal now (2004: 352). Death, therefore, has no fear for him; it is even something to be welcomed. The world is a complicated drama production and 'death is a changing of body, like changing of clothes on the stage, or, for some of us, a putting off of body, like in the theatre the final exit' (quoted in Jantzen 2004: 352).

The Image of Beauty

In his major work the *Enneads*, Plotinus deals with the phenomenon of beauty by demonstrating its traces in the natural world and in ourselves. The universe, said Plotinus, is a thing of beauty. The task is to discipline oneself into ways of seeing and perception which recognize this beauty of the universe and self and to see them *as a unity and a whole*. All such perceived beauty is a trace and image of something greater, but we must be careful: 'When he sees beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they *image*' (Plotinus 1966–8: 1.6.8). Besides, we are only able to perceive beauty because it has an echo of the beauty that we are. A kinship is recognized. As Miles comments,

> The soul recognises beauty because soul participates in form, albeit at a greater intensity than bodies do. So we see something as beautiful when it matches the beautiful form that is ourselves, that is soul. We detect beauty by kinship, whether beauty in bodies or beauty in ideas, virtues, or ways of life. (Miles 1999: 39)

Everyone possesses the potential to see the world and themselves in this way, but such a way of seeing requires discipline. Contemplative seeing, with one's eyes closed in relaxed concentration, brings real sight to the beauty of the world and ourselves. Plotinus insists we must awake to another way of seeing, which everyone is capable of doing, but few achieve. When you look at images of beauty, do not be as Narcissus, who attempted to possess the image, but see into the image deeply and know how it is a representation of the beauty emanating from its source.

Remembering the Beauty of the Self

To see the universe and the self as beautiful is to see at the level of perception and to see that beauty related to the One. An act of remembrance then takes place. As Miles comments, 'To see *as beautiful* is to perceive that their beauty is supplied by the great beauty' (Miles 1999: 42). On seeing a beautiful object the soul is thrilled and excited and delightedly returns to its own self. Not unlike Plato's understanding, Plotinus argues that we know that the things in this world are beautiful because they participate in form (Plotinus 1966–8: 1.6.2). Form is the bridge between the sensible world and the realm of being, the intellect. The soul recognizes beauty because it shares in form and thereby a spirit of kinship which gives delight and comfort. The excitement is at its most intense when the soul's beauty is seen in oneself or someone else. But the soul recoils from its counter-image; anything ugly disturbs what the soul is. In contrast, sensible beauty, if perceived aright, encourages us to move closer to the invisible, higher beauty:

> Our explanation of (the beauty of bodies) is that the soul, since it is by nature what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin to it or a trace of its kindred reality, is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and its own possessions … the things in this world are beautiful by participating in form. (Plotinus 1966–8: 1.6.2, quoted in Miles 1999: 41)

Plotinus believes we are what we desire. We become what we see and we begin to live truly through seeing beauty. This ability to discern beauty has formative effects; 'That which is sympathetic to it is that which imitates it in some way, like a mirror able to catch a form' (Plotinus 1966–8: 4.3.1). To see beauty is to see life (soul) and form (intellect). Full light may be as blinding as in Plato's cave, but with training and contemplative eyes it is possible to see such beauty and by means of an act of remembering to look at yourself, others and the universe with a new vision. When one recognizes beauty in others one knows that they have a light which plays on them from elsewhere and this recognition of the soul's kinship with the One increases love for its images. The Gnostics were misguided in their contempt for the universe. Plotinus points out that loving the higher world always entails loving this world, since this universe could not exist if it were cut off from that other world.

Plotinus emphasizes that the return to the One is based on a desire for the Good, the source. Any such ascent is only possible through a denial of the self; this is why Armstrong calls it a 'checked return' since the self is tempted to give in to 'self-affirmation rather than to return to its source' (Armstrong 1953: 128). It encompasses illumination and passionate yearning given by the One from the start. Plotinus writes, 'The soul loves the Good because it has been moved by Him to love from the beginning' (quoted in Armstrong 1953: 128). The main difference between the Plotinian and Christian conceptions is that the action of the former is impersonal and indifferent while that of the latter is dramatic and personal. There is also no mention of grace in Plotinus and certainly no intervention of the Good into the world of matter. The notion of the self in Plotinus is stable, eternal and divine, whereas for many Christian writers the self has to be made and formed by a ceaseless movement towards the infinite source of love. As I have already discussed, this notion of ceaseless movement is echoed in St Augustine's idea of *mutabilitas* or instability, seen most startlingly in Book 12 of the *Confessions* and in Gregory of Nyssa's insistence on the transformational journey of movement and rest, as I shall show later in this chapter. Armstrong sums up the contrast well when referring to Plotinus:

> His conviction never seems to waver that our highest part, our true self, whether it can be properly described as Intellect or as soul conformed to intellect, remains permanently above, eternally stable and indefectible. For the Christian this eternal stability is something which belongs to God, not to any created spirit, human or angelic. We do not already possess it by nature, but may be given a share in it by the free gift of God. (1953: 134)

However, like those Neoplatonic thinkers we have encountered earlier, Plotinus's understanding of what we desire and look for always reflects a movement beyond the material to its source: 'the ultimate object and origin of our love, lies "over the horizon" of thought, which impels us at the least to leave even intelligible beauty behind and seek union with the Good beyond intellect and being' (quoted in Armstrong 1953: 159). In the *Enneads*, Plotinus describes the stages of response to beauty with reference to three types of persons: musician, lover and philosopher (Jantzen 2004: 353). Just as a musician must not be trapped by individual pieces of music and the lover go beyond the individual body, so must we move into the immaterial and the beautiful; as Jantzen comments, 'In the process of climbing to the immaterial and contemplating the beauty of the intelligible rather than the sensory world, the musician/lover turns into the philosopher, the one who moves already in the higher world' (2004: 354). The soul must yearn for that which is not subject to mortality and towards a love of the beautiful beyond bodies and sexual attraction.

For Plotinus, the universe must be recognized as a thing of beauty and this is the path towards a union with the One who is Beauty. Creation emanates from the One source, like rays from the sun: 'The beauty and harmony of the material world is a consequence of the unity and perfection that flows down to it through Intellect and Soul' (Jantzen 2004: 354). The One is responsible for making things beautiful, from the smallest leaves to the most delicate flowers. Humanity ascends to the One through the experience of beauty. Plotinus always looks to another world, to eternity

beyond the horizon, to a way out of the corrupted bodies which decay and die. In the process the true self must keep its distance from the political and the social since these will never encourage an ascent to the One.

However, seeing beauty aright has to be worked at. A discipline of the body and mind is called for if the soul is to recognize the beauty of the universe and the self. The virtues of self-control, courage and wisdom act as purifications of the soul, with each virtue entailing a refusal to identify one's 'self' with one's body. The experience of seeing and having a vision of the One is an experience of tender 'touching'. Through the part of the soul which has remained above, love becomes the connecting medium: 'So from the power which is intensely active about the object, and from a kind of overflow from that object, love came to be as an eye filled with its vision, like a seeing that has its image with it' (Plotinus 1966–8: 3.5.3). And this in turn generates love for the One's images reflected in the universe.

Plotinus, as I have said, never allied his philosophy with any religious system. Nor do we find any inclination to venerate or give worship to the One who is the source of beauty. But like Christianity, Plotinus emphasized the importance of an ascent towards the sources of beauty and how this could be released through discipline and contemplation. For Plotinus, therefore, the notion of petitionary prayer is not in evidence, since the Good or One cannot be affected in this way. Rather the goal is to re-orientate one's consciousness towards the Good and, in so doing, find peace and happiness. Plotinus's ideas have been influential on Catholic understandings of the sacraments but he himself believed that the need for signs and material helps were not necessary in the higher spiritual world of the self (Armstrong 1953: 137).

'Climbing the Hills of Desire': Gregory of Nyssa and the Movement of *Eros*

I now move on to discuss the work of Gregory of Nyssa to highlight more systematically the Christian anagogic ascent to divine Beauty which has been introduced into much of my argument so far. Gregory again records how this experience is a movement from the visible to the invisible. Born in Cappadocia about 330 CE, he became Bishop of Nyssa in 372, eventually becoming one of the leading voices in the Eastern Church. Throughout his writings he demonstrated a mystical approach to the monastic life which his brother, Basil the Great, had largely been responsible for creating.

Gregory of Nyssa describes the movement of *eros* towards a divine Beauty by means of the stepping stones of the visible. God communicates a spiritual beauty through all the created order, even though the archetype of the beauty we see in finite creation 'escapes our comprehension. For how can words possibly find any mode of description which could make it visible?' (1962: 106). The person with a purified mind is able to use 'what he sees merely as a step towards the vision of that spiritual beauty whose communication is the ultimate reason why all other things are rightly called beautiful' (1962: 107). God's beauty is discovered 'when we turn our minds to it' (1962: 114). Gregory's theology, like that of Denys, is essentially apophatic and liturgical. He suggests that the more one moves towards God the more exhilarating but 'dark' the experience becomes. The experience of beauty is one from light to

cloud to darkness, just as Moses' vision of God began with light and later progressed to an incomprehensible darkness. In the *Life of Moses* he uses the symbolism of the enemy's army in the Exodus narrative to describe those sins which must be left behind as the journey proceeds; and it is in the mystical waters of baptism that avarice, impure desire, greed, vanity, pride, irascible feelings, anger and jealousy are to be plunged. Then gradually, a person can purify herself further as the soul ascends to a higher truth by leaving 'all surface appearances, not only those which can be grasped by the senses but also those which the mind itself seems to see, and it keeps on going deeper until by the operation of the spirit it penetrates the invisible and incomprehensible, and it is there that it sees God' (1962: 118). The liturgical journey encapsulates this penetration into the invisible and incomprehensible Beauty.

Gregory argues that it is 'beauty' that Moses encounters on Mount Sinai; but with this experience he desires to see even more and to be filled 'with the very impression of the archetype. The bold desire of the soul that climbs the hills of desire tends towards the direct enjoyment of beauty, and not merely through mirrors' (1962: 146). This 'bold desire' is further encouraged and spurred on by the *eikon* or image encountered at each stage in the ascent, as an image in a mirror or statue encourages us to desire more – the actual stamp of the archetype – never being satisfied with any mediated image of the thing sought. However, Gregory is soberly reminded about the dangers of idolatry at this point as he recalls Moses' saying in Exodus 34:20. 'Thus canst not see my face; for man shall not see me and live'. In the *Life of Moses* he writes, 'The true vision and the true knowledge of what we seek consist precisely in not seeing, in an awareness that our goal transcends all knowledge and is everywhere cut off from us by the darkness of incomprehensibility' (1962: 29). The person who believes that God can be grasped, and comprehended, suffers death. In contrast, any true vision of God depends on an ongoing search involving movement and rest, which always gives life. What must be done is to fix our eyes on those things which help us to see and be changed, which in turn will assist us to keep alive the desire to see more and more (1962: 148). Gregory accepts and teaches this Christian truth and it is the foundation of the apophatic tradition.

This ceaseless movement towards God is based on *eros* and can never be satiated or come to a definitive rest of knowledge. The movement is both endless and compelling, a spiritual quest which is an erotic impulse, never complete, since God, as Loughlin puts it 'is infinitely other, and so always withdrawing and always arriving, filling the soul with the desire to follow after' (2004: 14). The beautiful and attractive never desert the lover but beckon her on. Moses, the man of *eros par excellence*, desires that which is absolute goodness and beauty but comes to realize that, as sojourner, the object of his quest can never be totally found or embraced. There is always more which can be given, more to be seen: 'To ascend the mountain and see God is to see God's unseeability, an even further distance' (2004: 13). It is desire which is the fuel and which sets alight the potential to live life more fully; such desiring is participation in God, produced by God's own desiring. Those who desire God always do so because they are first desired by God and the image of the soul shooting an arrow and wounding God out of an intense desire (not an uncommon one in the early modern period) comes to embody this notion.

Gregory's understanding of this notion of 'brilliant darkness' is reinforced in his *Life of Moses* and *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*. If earlier texts had suggested a glimpse of the divine, here his words convey more fully how the enlightened mind can never gain direct access to the divine, an awareness revealed to those entering the third stage of the three-fold mystical path – contemplation. The mystical path of purgation, illumination and contemplation is taken up by Gregory in his *Life of Moses*. The first stage in the movement consists of the illumination given by the supernatural life, characterized by a turning away from the multiplicity of things, *apathia*, and a renewed confidence in God where all fear and shame are removed, *parrhesia*. The second entails knowledge of God which is a 'feeling of presence' within the soul by the spiritual senses, very different to a 'concrete' knowledge of His essence, which is impossible for a person to attain. Like Augustine, Gregory teaches that the Trinity inhabits the soul, like a sachet of myrrh without which clothing loses its fragrance. Grace is like, 'the fragrance which betrays the presence of spikenard, the ray that reflects the sun, the taste that reveals the substance' (Daniélou 1962: 25). But it is impossible to look directly at God Who dwells in the soul; the experience is indirect and mediated, whereby one captures a small glimpse of the divine. At the third stage the soul realizes that it cannot come to know God directly. It is cut off by the 'darkness of incomprehensibility'. This sounds as if it might be a stage of despair, but Gregory tells us that this movement towards God as a never-ending, ceaseless desiring of the Father is uplifting. As he writes in *Sermon* 9,

> Thus they never stop rising, moving from one beginning to the next, and the beginning of ever greater graces is never limited of itself. For the desire of those who thus rise never rests in what they can understand; but by ever greater and greater desire, the soul keeps rising constantly to another which lies ahead, and thus it makes its way through ever higher regions towards the transcendent. (1962: 213)

In the *Life of Moses* Gregory uses the evocative phrase 'luminous darkness' partly to refer to St John's reference, 'no man hath seen God at any time' (John, 1, 18), but also to point to those higher stages of contemplative recognition. He argues that the 'darkness of incomprehensibility' becomes present to those who contemplate and with this recognition the self becomes transformed (quoted in Daniélou 1962: 118). At the moment the searcher recognizes this truth in the *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* she forgets herself and is able to feel a love for Him whom she desired. The bride is given her true identity, therefore, only in relation to the bridegroom, which entails the self stepping outside the self, and which, as McIntosh comments, is 'in fact the constitution of the self, the drawing of the self from phantasm into truth' (1998: 200). The movement of desire de-centres the self which is constructed by others and swings the emphasis on the ground of our being. It demands that we see ourselves and all other selves in relation to the One who is our most intimate centre.

The ascent entails the recognition that the divine is at the centre of the self. In his *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* he refers again to Moses' experience and to the bride, who having given up all finite modes of comprehension, was able to find her Beloved by faith at the centre of her being, an encounter of a pre-Fall experience:

> And I will never let him go, now that I have found Him, from the grasp of faith, until he comes within my chamber. For the heart is indeed a chamber to be filled by the divine indwelling – that is, when it is restored to the state that it had in the beginning. (Gregory of Nyssa 1962: 31)

Such ecstatic love is described by Gregory in different ways: as dizziness, sleep, madness, wounding. Love is a 'sober intoxication'. For example, David becomes intoxicated with the beauty of God,

> he saw while in ecstasy, that divine beauty which no mortal can behold, and cried out in those famous words: *Every man is a liar (Ps. 115.11)* And this I take to mean that anyone who attempts to portray the ineffable Light in language *is* truly *a liar* – not because of any abhorrence of the truth, but merely because of the infirmity of his explanation' (1962: 105)

No-one is able to articulate fully the beauty felt and experienced. The concealment and at the same time revelation of the 'luminous darkness' is expressed in the *Canticle of Canticles* in imagery about 'drops of the night'.

Themes of change and movement are central to Gregory's understanding. The first inferior kind of change is the life-cycle. For example, one's longing for food is satisfied when one eats, but this is a perpetual cycle which brings us back to the same place again and is without any progress. Using the image of sand he writes that it is like children building castles in the sand – once you have put the effort in, they soon collapse and no trace is seen of your hard work. In contrast, the superior kind of change is a movement to a higher good, of being '*transformed from glory to glory*', a phrase he takes from St Paul (2 Cor. 3:18). Gregory highlights this paradox about change and stability which is at the heart of his theology, with reference to notions of stability and flight: 'a man advances farther on the path of perfection precisely insofar as he remains fixed and immovable in good … His very stability becomes as a wing in his flight towards heaven; his heart becomes winged because of his stability in good' (1962: 53). 'Another place' becomes possible only through the attainment of the stability of goodness, which releases a flight to the unknown, the wings of the Dove representing involvement in the divine life. Such an experience is radically personal and transcendent as the soul participates in that which transcends it. The soul, writes Gregory, 'grows by its constant participation in that which transcends it; and yet the perfection in which the soul shares remains ever the same, and is always discovered by the soul to be transcendent to the same degree' (1962: 55). He concludes, 'Moses' desire is filled by the very fact that it remains unfulfilled … and this is the real meaning of seeing God; never to have this desire satisfied' (1962: 56). Daniélou captures well this paradoxical nature of Gregory's writing: 'God becomes ever more intimate and ever more distant; more intimate as the Dove and more distant as the Darkness, known by the smallest child and yet unknown to the great mystic' (1962: 54).

The Greek word *epectasis* crystallizes for Gregory this constant progress – Moses always finds another step that lies beyond the one he had reached. He deals with the potential frustration of the soul as each step along the path becomes one of incompletion, and a yearning desire to move to another point from where it is, while

arguing that disappointment never occurs since an expansion of the soul takes place at each stage allowing a constant renewal and moving forward to take place:

> Indeed, as the Source of the good keeps flowing and welling up without end, so too the participant, as it becomes larger, grows more and more in desire, by the fact that nothing that it receives is lost or left unused, and everything that flows in produces an increase in capacity. (1962: 63)

Each stage is like a first creation, a new beginning:

> At the creation, light shone forth at His command, and again at His order, the firmament arose … So too now, when the Word calls a soul that has advanced to come unto Him, it is immediately empowered at His command and becomes what the Bridegroom wishes. (1962: 65)

Baptism is the beginning of this rising up to the divinity, a movement which must be continued: 'From this beginning, then, which is faith, *thou shalt pass and come*: that is, you will now arrive and at the same time not cease to pass on perpetually by continuing to rise' (1962: 67). The glory which the soul through grace has received is surpassed by a greater glory as each step takes us nearer to the divine glory and transforms us into that which is more perfect at each stage.

Sacraments

In the *Sermon on the Baptism of Christ*, Gregory of Nyssa compares the sacrament as the return to a paradisal innocence. The 'time has come which brings us back to that fairness of our first estate, back to 'the innocence of the babe'. The devil will plot against 'the beauty of a new-born man', but after baptism 'sin henceforth is a corpse, pierced through by the javelin of baptism' (*Sermon*, 1892). He tells in the sermon how God 'didst banish us from paradise, and didst recall us; Thou didst strip off the fig-tree leaves, an unseemly covering, and put upon us a costly garment.' Never again shall the 'flaming sword encircle paradise around, and make the entrance inaccessible to those that draw near. Paradise, yea, heaven itself may be trodden by man …' Estranged creation, once 'at variance with itself, is knit together in friendship'. Gregory emphasizes the material element of water which secures the salvation of the baptized: just as, for example 'the wood of Christ's cross was a piece of poor tree … and the bramble bush showed to Moses the manifestation of the presence of God …' so water, 'though it is nothing else but water renews the man to spiritual regeneration, when the grace from above hallows it'. Baptism thus brings us to 'the dignity of nature that belongs to the Godhead' (*Sermon*, 1892). A person becomes ontologically and radically changed – something utterly divorced from his former self. He becomes orderly, sober and content with his own possessions and is able to reflect the Father's goodness, he Who does good to those who hate him and prays for those who despitefully use him. He begins to despise those things which are of the world. Those initiated into this rite by the priest, who is an instructor in hidden mysteries, will naturally wish to participate in further liturgies and join the angelic chorus, giving praise to his creator for this great gift. He writes,

And we men are made to join in the angels' song, offering worship of their praise to God. For all these things let us sing to God that hymn of joy which lips touched by the Spirit long ago sang loudly "Let my soul be joyful to the Lord … as on a bridegroom he hath set a mitre on me, and as a bride hath he adorned me with fair array. (*Sermon*, 1892)

Gregory advocates a 'participation in mystical symbols and rites', since these are the strengths of Christianity. Philosophical speculation has no such impact. Baptism is a mystical entrance into the death and resurrection of Jesus besides a rebirth of the self: 'After three days of death He rose again … So too by plunging three times in water instead of earth, entering and rising three times we imitate the grace of the resurrection on the third day' (*Sermon*, 1892). The Jordan is a river of return which flows back to heaven and has its source in Christ. It covers the entire world and is the water of baptism (Daniélou 1962: 20)

Gregory writes in *The Great Catechetical Discourse* how being thrice dipped is 'our earliest mortification' and how coming out forecasts the ease with which the 'pure shall rise in the blessed resurrection' (*Great Catechetical Discourse*, 1892). If baptism emphasizes the soul, then the Eucharist emphasizes the body. The body has been poisoned by sin, but the Eucharist is the antidote. 'Changed into the Body of God by the Word indwelling', it is 'at the same time changed into the body of that Word' (*Great Catechetical Discourse*, 1892). Like the teaching of Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus and Athanasius, Gregory argues that our corruptible bodies need a remedy to make them immortal and the Eucharist provides this solution. The Last Supper was a sacramental anticipation of the sacrifice of the cross – his death already accomplished on Holy Thursday. How else could the Victim be given to the apostles unless it was dead? Here the language of mystery is needed to demonstrate this apparent reversal in time: 'When he gave His disciples His body to eat and his blood to drink, His body was already immolated according to the will of Him Who by His power accomplished this mystery in an invisible and ineffable manner' (*Great Catechetical Discourse*, 1892). Daniélou also points out that Gregory considers the Eucharist primarily as the realization of the eschatological meal foretold in the Old Testament. The three important texts in this connection are Prov. 9:5, Ps 22:5 and Cant. 3:1; these are explained by Gregory in a eucharistic sense.

In summary, then, we might say that for Gregory, the movement of desire is the movement into mystery, into the unknown, the darkness of love and beauty which cannot be named. This entails the notion that any yearning desire in relation to the divine is centred round presence and absence, accepting that with each attempt something is given and something withheld. Gregory of Nyssa stressed paradoxically that the desire for God is eternally unappeased and yet fulfilled). It is the supreme paradox that movement and rest can be the same thing. As I have indicated, in his *Life of Moses*, that the ceaseless, unlimited spiritual life moves humanity on in the direction of the divine. And the ever-present points of arrival and departure are sustained through praise and prayerful activity which urge worshippers on to more activity. It is a movement of the soul for fulfilment but a movement which recognizes that the more one desires the more one escapes that which is sought.

Writing on the *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* Coakley acknowledges Gregory's apophatic theology has a foundation in love:

> In the Song it is the haunting image of the 'hand of the bridegroom' reaching out to draw us into darkness, that reminds us of the deep impossibility of circumscribing the divine 'essence' in intellectual terms: 'My beloved has put his hand through the hole of the door.' Human nature is not able to contain the infinite, unbounded divine nature. (2002: 122)

What is pertinent to note, in contrast to Augustine, is that Gregory's ascent to darkness does not disparage the memory of his erotic love of his former marriage. He writes in his introduction: 'I hope that my commentary will be a guide for the more fleshly-minded, since the wisdom hidden (in the Song of Songs) leads to a spiritual state of the Soul' (quoted in Coakley 2002: 162). The body is on a transformative journey, assisted by the Eucharist, towards its eventual resting place, and death is certainly not a dramatic shift but a natural movement into an angelic body, on a continuum from the fleshly body.

Gender and Beauty

It is important at this stage in the book not to forget the complex historical relationship between beauty, aesthetics and gender if we are to appreciate how Christianity has understood the relationship between beauty and the divine. The problem with von Balthasar's aesthetics is that he never addresses the problematic nature of gendered aesthetics and can at times, as Beattie (2006) has so ably demonstrated, allow his theology to fall under some odd gendered categories. Although the displacement of beauty in the development of Western thought is a disputed one, there can be no doubt that from Plato onwards, the description of the immortal and the beautiful is associated with the masculine rather than the feminine realm. In the *Symposium* Plato writes that those men who choose to become sexually involved with women virtually forego their potential ascent towards Beauty, whereas those males who are attracted to other males begin the ladder of ascent quite naturally. As Jantzen startlingly comments,

> Plato does not – given his gender assumptions could not – ever raise the question of whether attraction to a female body could similarly open up the way to knowing the essence of beauty. The female is for reproduction, mired in the body, inescapably linked with the physical processes of birth and death, and therefore at the opposite pole of immortal beauty. (2002: 434)

For Plato, procreancy of the spirit was more important than procreancy of the flesh and when a male was able to find another male with whom he could discuss things of honour and virtue, the intellectual bonding which resulted became the supreme means of attaining wisdom. Plato asks in the *Symposium* who would not prefer such spiritual fatherhood to merely human propagation. This Greek dualistic model rested upon a severe bias in favour of the male to the female (and slave) who, due to this unjust opposition, were hardly ever regarded as being spiritual.

Jantzen argues that there is a strong triangular and interlocking link between beauty, gender and death in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. The highest goal – that of reaching Immortal Beauty – is the next world where the desirous and gendered

body is freed from the temptations of the fleshy and the material. The immortal body is the only body which will enjoy the Beauty of the Immortal. Augustine, too, as we have seen, was always interested in beauty throughout his life, but held an ambivalent approach towards its presence and influence. Physical and natural beauty can become the means of the ascent towards Immortal beauty but they can also serve as a trap for the sexual body, tempting the person to be satisfied with the temporal, the sexual and the mortal, a fear which engrossed Augustine for most of his life.

This ambiguity is reflected in the controversial history of the Church's liturgy. For example, for Roman Catholic worship before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, there was an emphasis, as I have indicated, on the use of beauty's forms in order to release a movement of heavenly ascent, and yet an equal emphasis on 'another place' where beauty fully presides. In consequence, the incorporation of aesthetic forms within worship often became sites for contested debate since the ascent is both away from earthly beauty (lest it be corrupting) *and* at the same time released by it. Augustinian ambivalence about beauty is detected here. Earthly light beckons to and is co-extensive with heavenly light; the bodies of the saints and the disciples in stained glass windows reflect and point towards the heavenly glorified body of the resurrection and yet remain easily recognizable human shapes, representing a borderland space of ascent where, for example, the halo signifies that the body has somehow been re-formed, lost its fleshy, sexual and gendered physicality in favour of an intermediate state, or at least one which no longer entails the temptations associated predominantly with the female body. The body seen in the materiality of liturgy is both of this world and not of this world, un-gendered and asexual, occupying a unique ritual space and time. This denotes both a suspicion of the physical and an acknowledgement that the material ought never to be abandoned, for it is the very means by which that ascent is able to become possible.

This ambiguity towards the material, especially the body, was reflected in early ecclesial and liturgical practices (Torevell 2000b). The emphasis given to ritual sacrifice as the means of ascent towards the divine was epitomized in the fourth century by St John Chrysostom, who said that worshippers through the blood of Christ's sacrifice are 'instantly transported to the heavens' (quoted in Jay 1992: 116–17). As the institutionalization of the Eucharist developed in the West, the ritual of 'the sacrifice of the mass' became largely a means of atoning for sins and praying for the dead. This was not the theological and liturgical legacy of Denys, but rather that of St Augustine, who, as I have indicated, allowed his overriding concerns about temptation and sin to override his insights about beauty as a means of ascent. Sacrificial atoning for the committing of sins rather than worship as a return to the God of beauty became the norm. The created order as an emanation of divine beauty (as envisaged by Denys), which lent itself naturally to being a site for the return to the divine source, was replaced during modernity by a far more ambiguous notion of where 'real' beauty could be found. The fear of a God who might exact vengeance lest sacrifice be performed displaced the procession and return motif of Denys and in its place lodged a space of worship where male hierarchy assumed ritual power and which emphasized not the divinisation of humanity (an impossible notion especially for women) but the sinfulness of humanity.

It has taken the Christian Church a long time even to acknowledge the value of human embodiment in ritual forms. Savage's work on liturgical dance points to the ambiguous and contested site the gendered and moving body has experienced in the Church, and therefore in dance, which she sees as a much needed 'expression' in worship. Referring to the history of the constructed dualism of mind and body in Christian thinking and the gendered privileging of the intellect over the emotional body she writes, 'At times it has encouraged an attitude to Christ which gives excessive weight to what can be expressed in propositions, apprehended by the mind' (2000: 65). But dance, she argues, has the potential to become a mode of expressive movement which functions in a similar way to the icon in that it allows a glimpse of the divine to be disclosed. However, the Church has told a different story about the moving body and often insisted on its 'godlike immobility' in preference to its movement. As Savage comments, 'The idea of God as impassable, the unmoved mover (a notion arguably more Greek than biblical) is thus reflected in human stillness' (2000: 69). The *absence* of movement was preferred to movement and hence liturgical dance has had a chequered and somewhat persecuted history. Dance became too associated with sensuality and the pagan rites to gain easy acceptance in Christian worship. And it was particularly women who were the victims and who through their 'lower' nature and embodiment largely represented unholy sensuality. This is why females had to work much harder than men to gain 'holiness' in the medieval period (Bynum 1987), often going to extreme bodily lengths to eradicate the perceived corruption of their female bodies.

But dance can do much to fill in the dualisms left by a false dichotomy between the body and the soul. Although some waves of liturgical dance have been guilty of a 'psychological docetism' (Savage 2000: 74) by their distinctive style of subverting their own embodiment (for example, by eyes rolling to heaven), the potential of dance is significant due to its celebration of the movement of the body. In so doing, it allows another movement to take place – that of an ascent not in spite of but by means of the body, for it is a body which can never be separated from the spirit; the ascent is in and through the material not in spite of it. St Paul knew this when he encouraged the whole person – body, mind and soul – to be a living sacrifice to God.

Other areas of aesthetic performance point to the importance of the body. The production of many artistic forms cannot be divorced from the gendered body. Jazz grew out of the oppressed black body and while Begbie's work (1997; 2000) is significant in that it encourages discussion on the importance of music's affinity with theology, he fails to recognize how music is inspired by and through different bodies, often those undergoing hardship and oppression. The suffering black body is often the source and expression of jazz and through its prism a whole history of oppression can be witnessed, a 'curious and unusually objective witness to the twentieth century … a story about race and race relations … lynchings and civil rights' (Ward and Burns 2000: vii).

Even in a collection of essays on the importance of the Incarnation and the Word made flesh for understanding the relationship between theology and the arts, little is made of the gendered body apart from the essay by Savage to which I have referred. Hart does offer some invaluable insights about art in terms of 'going beyond what is given' – by which he means the raw materials used in artistic creation (reflecting

my emphasis throughout this book on the importance of the materiality) – but he fails to address the gendered nature of aesthetics even when directly referring to the Incarnation and what he calls 'artistry' (2000: 15). Surprisingly, too, the sculptor Aldrich in the same collection makes the claim that her art seems to possess the ability to give viewers a 'profoundly visceral awareness of their own physicality' besides promoting a feeling of 'one's invisible spirit' in relation to the experience of the concrete art form (2000: 102–103), but nowhere does she mention how the sexual or gendered body might create and be affected in different ways by such sculpture.

Theological appraisals of beauty also need to listen more carefully to secular writers of aesthetics since they often point to the problematic relationship between aesthetics, gender, political and social relations much more clearly than many theological voices do. Tending to emphasize more analytically the correlation between beauty and its counterpart – ugliness and violence – they have drawn much needed attention to the inseparability of aesthetics and ethics. Those writers on aesthetics working in the continental tradition seem far more attentive to how the study of aesthetics has to be linked to other dominant social processes and power relations which determine what shall count as beauty (Cazeaux 2000; Jantzen 2002). The history of aesthetics is as political as it is gendered and appraisals which disregard such issues fail to understand its complex development. Some feminist art writers, for example, deconstruct the notion of beauty in relation to aesthetic values of femininity, promoting notions of disgust in its place often with the aim of debunking myths about female identity. This emergence also serves to undermine the mind–body distinction and resituate the importance of embodiment and desire in discussions about aesthetics (Korsmeyer 2004: 9). Much needed feminist analysis of the notion of the 'male gaze' has unearthed power roles highlighting how active male subjects invariably view passive female objects, which in turn determine the manner in which others come to perceive and know the world (Korsmeyer 2004: 53). The feminist critique of the disinterested 'aesthetic attitude' to representations has also drawn attention to significant power relations. As Korsmeyer comments, 'Aesthetic ideologies which would remove art from its relation with the world disguise its ability to inscribe and to reinforce power relations' (2004: 51). This is clearly a concern in relation to many religious paintings which privilege hierarchical power and gender relations and act as a reinforcement of male hierarchical categories. Sadly, too, very few theologians have attempted to plot the inextricable correlation between beauty and ethics, although, as I have already noted, von Balthasar's discussion of the loss of beauty in the western symbolic is strongly linked to his observation of the emergence and increase of violence and satanic forces. The other notable exception is de Gruchy's account of aesthetics and social justice in South Africa (de Gruchy 2001).

Orthodox Writers on Beauty

Alexander Schmemann: Liturgy against the Lifelessness of the World

I now proceed to discuss the work of three Orthodox writers, Alexander Schmemann, Paul Evdokimov and David Hart, to examine further the movement of beauty I am concerned with in this chapter. The writings of the Russian Orthodox theologian Schmemann illuminate creatively the importance of discerning the beauty and glory of the material world and its implication for liturgy. He argues that since many secular approaches to existence see the world as 'lifeless' and matter as unredeemed, there results a common failure to acknowledge that an important aspect of humanity's identity is *homo adorans* (1973: 15). Secularism, for Schmemann, is primarily a heresy about humanity as *homo adorans* (1966: 16). In contrast, worship is substantially based on an understanding of the world as full of God's life, glory and beauty at odds with the secular notion of the world as *lifeless*. Secularism entails being unable to 'see' the importance of matter, the visible means by which God reveals Himself to the world (1966: 16). As a result, the basic theological definition of a person is that he is a *priest* and 'he stands in the centre of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God …' (Schmemann 1973: 15) is undermined. Every word and action of liturgy, therefore, explicitly encourages humanity to see everything in the *world* as a revelation of God, 'a sign of his presence, the joy of his coming, the call to communion with him, the hope for fulfilment in him' (1966: 140–41). Secularism is as much a lie about the world and the self as it is about God.

The inter-relationship between matter, adoration and ascent to the divine is expounded well by Schmemann. In *For the Life of the World* he relates the inherent hunger humanity has for God and his role in the world: 'All desire is finally a desire for Him'; humanity has a special place and role in the universe – 'to *bless* God for the food and the life he receives from Him' (1973: 15). God 'blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day (that is, time), and this means that he filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all this "very good"' (1973: 15). So the most natural thing to do is to bless God in return and in seeing the world as God sees it, 'in this act of gratitude and adoration' to 'now, name and possess the world' (1973: 15). Liturgy is never separated from this matter but as 'the very symbol of this world and therefore the very content of our *prosphora* to God … must in the *anphora* be lifted up, taken out of "this world". This is communion with God by means of "matter" that reveals the true meaning of "matter", i.e. of the world itself' (1973: 121). Echoing my earlier discussion of the importance of the material for an anagogic ascent to the divine, this orthodox theologian endorses the same liturgical process as a movement from the material to the immaterial.

For Schmemann, the problem is that humankind has *not returned God's love*. He has loved the world as an end in itself 'and not as transparent to God' (1973: 16). It 'seems natural for man to experience the world as opaque, and not shot through with the presence of God' (1973: 16). This is what a 'fallen world' means – not being able to see 'the awareness that God is all in all' (1973: 16). Secular man 'does not realise that to eat can be to receive life from God in more than its physical sense.

He *forgets* that the world, its air or its food cannot by themselves bring life … By themselves they can produce only the appearance of life' (1973: 17). 'Real' life is not possible apart from God since matter becomes mere 'things' without life. Things which are treated merely as things in themselves end up destroying themselves because only in God do they have life. The consequences are grave since humanity then becomes a salve rather than a priest of creation. On relinquishing the eucharistic life he becomes separate from the beauty of life: 'In one of the beautiful pieces of Byzantine hymnody Adam is pictured sitting outside, facing Paradise, weeping. It is the figure of man himself' (1973: 18).

The Incarnation allowed humanity to understand who he really was and where his hunger had been driving him. 'Christianity, however, is in a profound sense the end of all religion … Religion is needed where there is a separation between God and man. But Christ who is both God and man has broken down the wall between man and God. He has inaugurated a new life, not a new religion' (1973: 19–20). Schmemann's aim is to remind people that 'in Christ, life – life in all its totality – was returned to man, given again as sacrament and communion, made Eucharist' (1973: 20). *Leitourgia* is an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not as a mere collection of individuals; it ensures a ministry on behalf of and in the interests of a community (1973: 25). It encompasses a journey to the kingdom.

The ascent to the divine is central in the orthodox liturgy, which begins with a solemn doxology: 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and unto ages of ages.' The response 'Amen' signifies that the worshipper 'expresses the agreement of the Church to follow Christ in His ascension to His Father, to make this ascension the destiny of man' (Schmemann 1973: 29). The experience of ascent is one of joy for 'The liturgy is, before everything else, the joyous gathering of those who are to meet the risen Lord and to enter with him into the bridal chamber' (1973: 29). And it is in the beauty of the liturgy – in its singing and ritual, vestments and incensing – that this expectation comes about. It is beautiful because we do it out of love, expectation and joy. It is heaven on earth (Binns 2002: 39–59; Hahn 1999), the joy of 'recovered childhood, that free, unconditioned and disinterested joy which alone is capable of transforming the world' (Schmemann 1973: 30). As long as Christians love the Kingdom of God, and not simply discuss it, they will 're-present' and signify it, in liturgy, art and beauty. The celebrant of the sacrament of joy will 'appear in a beautiful chasuble, because he is vested in the glory of the Kingdom, because even in the form of man God appears in glory' (1973: 30). Like Moses before God, worshippers are covered in the glory of God. The words of another liturgist, Guardini, sum up Schmemann's aesthetic theology of liturgy:

> In the liturgy he is to go 'unto God, who giveth joy to his youth' … Because the life of the liturgy is higher than that to which customary reality gives either the opportunity or the form of expression, it adapts suitable forms and methods from that sphere in which alone they are to be found, that is to say from art … it is in the highest sense the life of a child, in which everything is picture, melody and song. (Quoted in Schmemann 1973: 30–31)

The whole movement of liturgy might be contextualized within the entrance which signifies the passage of the whole Church into the world to come, the movement into the heavenly sanctuary, and Holy is the word which describes the One who 'is the end of all our hunger, all our desires … the mysterious treasure which attracts us' (Schmemann 1973: 32).

Within the Roman Catholic tradition Newman stands out as one who, like Schmemann, knew the importance of the material world for seeing traces of God's Beauty and its impact on our sense of adoration. God's Immensity, His Wisdom, His power, His loving-kindness, but above all 'the glory and beauty of his eternal excellence' (Newman 1984: 295) are manifest in the created order which naturally lead to a voice 'full of praise and worship' even for the 'dimmest glimmerings of His glory' (1984: 296). If we were to be given a glimpse of the 'Eternal Uncreated beauty' we 'should die of the very rapture of the sight'. Moses, unable to forget his brief sight of this beauty in the Bush, asked to see it fully, and on this very account was refused. 'He said Show me Thy glory; and he said Thou canst not see My face; for man shall not see Me and live' (1984: 297). And it is in the countenance of Christ that we see 'no new beauty … but the manifestation, in a human form, of Attributes which have been from Everlasting' (1984: 304). Newman notes how a movement of *ecstasis* leading to adoration occurs when such beauty is perceived and is able to draw us away from ourselves in admiration:

> As among men, youth, and health, and vigour, have their finish in that grace of outline, and lustre of complexion, and eloquence of expression, which we call beauty, so in the Almighty God, though we cannot comprehend His holy attributes … yet we can, as creatures, recognise and rejoice in the brightness, harmony, and serenity, which is their resulting excellence. (1984: 295)

Evdokimov: The Movement to Him-who-is-Beauty

For Evdokimov, too, the spiritual life consists of a movement of desire towards the God of beauty which is simultaneously a movement of interior transformation. This is only possible because 'we possess an essential orientation that determines us. The resemblance proffered is in the personal realization of the objective image. It releases the *epektasis*, the tension of striving towards the Most High' (1998: 157). He notes that St Basil suggests that a person is created with a hunger for beauty because as an 'image of God' he is related to God (Evdokimov 1996: 19). The self-presence of divine beauty spurs the person on to the source of that beauty. St Cyril of Alexandria, he comments, writes that we receive a gift at baptism which orients us to a life of contemplation and that the 'vocation of the Spirit is to be the Spirit of beauty, the form of the forms' (1996: 11). The journey entails going beyond the self as the searcher casts himself into God 'to find there the appeasement of his longing. Holiness is nothing else but an unquenchable thirst, the intensity of desire for God' (Evdokimov 1998: 157). The spiritual life is a progression that never stops,

> 'No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.' Every pause is a regression. The total character of the consecration of every baptism and

confirmed person … places such a one in extreme tension every instant, in one's yearning for the ultimate, the impossible. (1998: 74)

In turn this occasions a seeing of others as God: 'St Seraphim addressed everyone he met as "My joy". He saw in each person God himself coming to meet him' (1998: 158).

The cosmos, too, possesses its own Logos, its 'entelechy', which is tied to created materiality itself. This is achieved, suggests Evdokimov, by divine *fiat* and as St Paul recognizes, glory appears where the form and the idea of God which inhabits it, become one. This is expressed most clearly in the Orthodox rite for the consecration of a church. The *troparion* (fourth tone) sings the praises of the coming of Him-who-is-Beauty: 'As you spread out the splendour of the heavens on high, so also here below you have revealed the *beauty* of the holy dwelling of your glory' (1996: 4). The *epiclesis* (the sending down of the Holy Spirit) reminds God's people of the greatness of God's presence at 'Mount Sinai, the miracle of the Burning Bush, and the Temple of the great Solomon as an image of the new Covenant' (1996: 4). And this same spirit of life and light forms us into the beauty that God wants for us, after which a person's only real choice, according to Evdokimov, is to become a complete and living doxology, a person of praise giving homage to the God of beauty.

All genuine theology flows from such a liturgical experience of the beauty and glory of God. Referring to Gregory of Nyssa he comments that a theologian is someone who attempts to put into language the liturgical experience of God. Such theology (even its dogmas), always derive from liturgy and prayer and ought to be written as liturgical compositions. Evdokimov refers to St Gregory of Nazianzus, who notes that God has made humanity the singer of his radiance (1996: 11). For Evdokimov, 'fearful ugliness … is an eclipse of content … It is an empty form, an absolutely adequate form for an absolutely non-existent content' (1996: 13) and in stark contrast to the sacramental form of the world. Quoting Maximus the Confessor he comments how 'the unspeakable and prodigious fire hidden in the essence of things, as in the bush, is the fire of divine love and the dazzling brilliance of his beauty inside everything' (1996: 12). The beauty of nature manifests an epiphany of the Transcendent. As Evdokimov notes, 'The epiphany transforms nature into a cosmic place of radiance, a "burning bush"' (1996: 24). The transfiguration of the Lord is a transfiguration of the disciples (1996: 25) and God's Spirit communicates itself through the forms of the world. It is important, says Evdokimov, 'to understand that Christian spirituality is based on the concrete nature of the Incarnation and deals with the whole man and the cosmos as "new creations"' (1996: 29).

The experience of the beautiful is always an illumination from within. It comes to us and we are grasped by it as we come to know it intimately and it moulds us into its form. Such an experience is not related to the mind or reason but to the heart in the Pascalian sense (Evdokimov 1996: 20–21). And it is always the Spirit which leads at the very depth and core of the self. In a strongly Augustinian sentence, Evdokimov writes, 'The divine Other becomes more deeply rooted in my being than my own soul, and I, the beloved follow wherever He leads' (1996: 23). However, a Christian understanding of beauty is often revealed in weakness and the frail body. As Evdokimov expresses it,

A powerful spirit can take on a weak body; this is the imperfection of our world. This condition refers to the mystery of the *kenosis* of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53:2 'without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes' … it is this kenotic veil thrown over his splendour that is expressed in psalm 44.3 (the Septuagint): 'You are beautiful, the most beautiful of the children of men.' (1996: 12)

Dostoevsky reminds us that the 'fools or Christ' often suffered considerable shame to order to show the light.

Symbolic Realism

Because of its symbolic realism, says Evdokimov, the liturgy possesses the means of bridging heaven and earth. In contemplating such symbols the worshipper encounters the Holy Spirit, which shines through the liturgy and the sacraments. In worship, each person meets the divine Eros who comes out of himself and unites himself to us. For Evdokimov, this birth in Beauty, so strongly underscored in the mysticism of the liturgy, forms the *artist* and poet within each person. It is not simply the priest who is called to be an artist or poet, therefore, but all those who partake in the divine liturgy of beauty as they become transformed and then begin themselves to communicate to others that beauty of which they are a part. The saint is not a superman but someone who 'lives his truth as a liturgical being' (1996: 15). The early Fathers recognized this since they always held the view that a human being is a person of the *Sanctus*. Referring again to Maximus the Confessor, he writes that such a person joins the angelic choirs in an 'eternal unchanging movement around God … sings and blesses the triple face of the unique God with triple blessings' (1996: 5). The *Sanctus* sung during the liturgy is always a song produced by the Holy Spirit. A person's only 'free' work is to sing the praises of God. Genesis 1:28 asks each person 'to fill the earth and conquer it' which is none other than a request to 'transform the earth into a cosmic temple in which to worship God and then offer that earth to the Creator' (1996: 16). The Pauline line 'You have been sealed in the Holy Spirit … and God has obtained (these sealed persons) for the praise of his glory' (Ephesians 1:14), sums up, therefore, the vocation and doxological ministry of each person.

At the same time, Evdokimov argues that a falsely constructed vision of worship can easily lead to corruption and perversion and the development of a false autonomy, extricated from divine love. Beauty is capable of deceiving and displaying an alarming indifference to truth and the biblical story of the fruits of the forbidden tree reflects this notion. The woman saw that the fruit was 'good to eat' and pleasing to the eye and desirable. As a result, sensual pleasure was elevated into an absolute, even above good and evil. (1996: 38). But with religious experience, which is rooted in love (since God only created out of love), contemplation manifests itself in love with every creature debasing the narcissistic self in favour of a divine self.

Christian mysticism is always based on a sacramental understanding of the world. In order that Christ be formed in each person, baptism and the Eucharist are essential and the one who lives sacramentally in Christ learns to read history liturgically. As Evdokimov notes,

The words of St Paul that God acquired his people 'for the praise of his glory' have a parallel in the Book of Revelation. Here our only activity is 'to fall down and worship'. This is because all praise, even doxology, Eucharist and thanksgiving 'redeems time'. It opens upon 'the eternal present'. (1998: 246–7)

The symbolism of baptism – the descent into the water signifying death to a previous past and the raising to a new life – takes seriously the metamorphosis which occurs and is why the ancient rites placed before baptism the *lavacrum*, the rite of exorcism and the solemn renouncing of the Evil One (1998: 73). Negatively this entails a ceaseless fight and never-ending struggle but positively it means a new life in Christ. The rite of tonsure, an organic part of the rite of Chrismation/Confirmation in the Eastern Church, is identical to that of entering the monastic life. The prayer of the rite asks: 'Bless your servant who has come to give you as her/his first offering the tonsure of the hair of her/his head'.

An Unquenchable Thirst and 'Impenetrable Circle of Silence'

In the World, of the Church Evdokimov criticizes attempts at demythologizing theology since they ignore the advantages of negative theology. Tillich, Robinson and Bultmann are mistaken: 'These reactions, based in their critiques of religion, are at the same time ineffective because of their lack of understanding apophatic or negative theology' (Evdokimov 2001:185). The silence insisted upon in this approach is ignored in favour of a demythologizing which reduces rather than enlightens the biblical message. Mystical knowledge is knowledge beyond knowledge: 'Around the deep abyss of God, the flaming sword of the cherubim drew an impenetrable circle of silence' (2001: 185). God's love being absurd, is reflected in the mystery of His silence: '*Adonai* replaces the unspeakable name of God and *Yahweh*, the name one cannot pronounce' (2001: 185). Attempting to prove God's existence wounds the Truth. Evdokimov is critical of much recent theology because it has lost its sense of mystery. What characterizes much of this work is speculation about God and a limited understanding about dynamic thinking *in* God (2001: 180). When the desert Fathers recognised the powerlessness of words, they counselled veneration of the mystery by silence (Evdokimov 1998: 118) and this tradition of prayerful silence around the authentic Word is the beginnings of liturgy. He concludes, 'the only efficacious argument for the existence of God is the liturgical argument of prayer-filled adoration' (Evdokimov 2001: 186).

David Hart: 'An Imaginative Re-appropriation'

The contemporary Orthodox theologian Hart also offers an exposition of beauty centred around the form and beauty of Christ (2003). He suggests that beauty always accepts 'that it is' rather than investigating 'what it is' and only a theology of beauty is able to do justice to the notion that the soul is capable of being enraptured by the irreducible givenness of the world, with its concomitant claims upon our wonder and surprise. Reason is never able to respond adequately to a world of gratuity and excess. Entrusting ourselves to what is uncontrollable and more than ourselves, a

Christian aesthetics endorses the view that it is not possible to reduce the world to the pretensions of our self-manipulated power. It acknowledges that humanity's eyes may be ceaselessly opened by the Light, never seeing the fullness of what is given and, indeed, that any shutting of one's eyes to the excess of God's Light is a perverse display of the will (Hart 2003: 138).

In the Incarnation God offers a form or persuasion which is non-violent and non-coercive, but nevertheless, enough to make those with a different understanding of Truth plan to use the most brutal weapons of violence in opposition. However, God's beauty can never be known by anyone who finds sense in the violent stilling of violence or who uses the language of the enemy to combat an aesthetics of non-violence. The presence of Christian beauty in the world is always a resurrected presence and it is the task of the Church to enact and offer this form of beauty to the world. The ecclesial responsibility is to ensure a never-ending unveiling of that presence, in the power of the Holy Spirit, by means of a non-coercive invitation; the Church accepts that's God's beauty can never be forcefully imposed on the world.

The way of seeing such beauty is not according to the light of a glamorous world and its self-construction of inventive ruses towards power and success. Any new way of seeing entails a shaping of ourselves, through the practices of the Church, to the things which we 'see' and the desire to see everything in a new perspective (Hart 2003: 337). But since the scale of the reversal of things in this new light cannot be exaggerated, it takes time to progress in such ways of revelatory seeing and shaping. Christ is 'an intrusion' upon the world and 'a transgression of the social order' (2003: 340). At times, humanity might well discern that the existing social order is good and wholesome, but this can only occur from the vantage point of the kingdom and the seeing that comes about through the varying contexts the Church offers. The beauty which the Church offers cannot be relegated to that of a 'secondary affiliation', another philosophy in and about the world to be discussed among others, as one hat among others in the ring.

The Church, called to encourage this 'feeling for' the shape of Christ's life, is bound to suffer itself since it offers a non-coercive sign to the world and a different form of politics to that offered by the secular world. But, at the same time, it must find a way of 'intruding' upon the world lest it becomes a self-contained mystery cult, intent upon a kind of Gnostic self-preservation. What it offers is good news, in and for the world, not a stubborn despair about the world since it offers the form and beauty of Christ:

> For the Christian understanding of the other cannot be seen as separate from the infinite beauty of Christ; the form of Christ institutes another way of seeing, a way of seeing which Nietzsche deplored since he saw in the suffering and decadence of the world only that. (Hart 2003: 344)

Once such seeing begins to unfold along the Christian path, a reversal of perception takes place. In the light of the resurrection, the lowly slave, who had been wrapped in the mocking garments of the robes of temporal power, becomes, for those who have eyes to see the only beauty of the world, clothed in majesty. Since seeing the beauty of Christ in the form of a slave is blighted by sin and the corruption of power,

it becomes the task of the Church to reveal imaginatively the beauty of the hidden God, especially to those most blind to its splendour, as the parables of the lost son, coin and sheep relate. This calls for an aesthetic act, an imaginative retelling of a way of being in the world which attracts and enthrals. As Hart writes, 'the translation of the narrative of Christ into practice must proceed as an imaginative re-appropriation of that narrative, a correspondence by way of variation, and requires a feeling for – and capacity to "perform" – the shape of Christ's life' (2003: 339). The sacramental vision of life and the world the Church offers is in contrast to Plotinus's idealist metaphysics of the beautiful, which can only point in one direction, from lower to higher. But in Christian thought the movement is both ways – it is possible to find the beautiful everywhere since the eternal Logos has proceeded downwards as creative gift in the form of a slave who is the beauty of God and upwards through the Son and the Spirit. The *kenosis* of God is a story of the Son's Incarnation which is not some out-of-character going forth and returning to the Father, for it is in the nature of the Trinity to give and go forth towards the other. And paradoxically, in Christ's dereliction, the Father's infinity shines, in his death, God's glory is poured forth, in His agony in the garden, Christ feels both an intimacy and a distance from the Father. On going forth the Son is always drawing near – such is the Trinitarian distance in which there can be no exile. God ventures into the godless where humanity finds His beauty and since he has crossed such a distance he allows us to do likewise. By going into the region of death, 'which lies over against God in enmity toward him and his creation, Christ shows that the divine infinity surpasses all separations' (2003: 322).

In all three of my chosen Orthodox writers we can see a shared emphasis on how the 'splendour of the heavens', that other place with which we have been concerned, is revealed in the 'glory' of the created order. The liturgy, as a consequence, uses this materiality to both lift us beyond its confines and to endorse its sacramental significance. The beauty of God to which we move is never, therefore, an alien beauty divorced from the world we experience and it is liturgy's challenge to endorse and sustain this view in relation to 'another place' to which we ultimately belong.

Georges Bataille

Although very different in many ways, the twentieth century French social theorist Georges Bataille endorses in his theory of religion some of the themes just dealt with by my chosen Orthodox theologians, in particular their emphasis on the lifelessness and atomization of a secular world. For Bataille, it is a reclamation and sense of the sacred which alone will bring about a reversal in the way a secular society views things. The essential element in Bataille's philosophy is the social, and one of his primary concerns is the recreation of communal living as a consequence of the formation of a communal self. The sacred (the forbidden element of society that exists at the margin) is the means towards establishing the unity and continuance of society. People must sacrifice themselves up to the values of the collectivity and become beings of communication. As Richardson notes, 'Through communication

the selfish pursuit of individual gain is perceived to be unacceptable to social well-being and it becomes possible to conceive of genuine social bonding' (1994: 35).

A 'homogenous' society, promoted by capitalism, reduces people to a mundane social role and dampens any remnants of creativity and collective effervescence in favour of a society based on calculation, exchange and industry. A 'heterogeneous' society, on the other hand, takes account of what exists on the margins and takes the sacred seriously. Without this recognition, religion will be ignored and the sacred forgotten and thus social being will disintegrate. It is important to be connected to those aspects of life which have been banished from the homogenous structure, for example, 'emotions like laughter and anger, non-utilitarian pursuits like games and eroticism', thereby taking account of a 'science of heterology' defined as what is 'other' (Richardson 1994: 36). Discontinuity is a condition of life which stems from a lost continuity. As human beings we strive to overcome this estrangement. However, such striving often causes anguish, 'the sentiment of a danger connected to the inextinguishable expectation' (Bataille 1992: 37), a desire to go beyond our limits. Christianity was unable to establish for him a context for the expression of his deeply held religious feelings. But it is not sufficient simply to turn one's back on Christianity but rather to go further and create a vitalized sense of the sacred, a 'hyper-Christianity', what Bataille termed an 'atheology' (1992: 115).

The Invisible Brilliance'

Bataille was deeply influenced by Durkheim's view of the distinction between the sacred and the profane and like him believed that society will only maintain its life and vitality if it keeps a sharp distinction between the sacred and profane. Religion has the potential to do just that, but has failed. Although he rejected the Catholicism of his early conversion, he primarily gave up on religion because it did not offer enough. What Bataille is essentially concerned about is 'undifferentiated continuity' and the reclaiming of a lost intimacy due largely to the forces of labour envisaged in a utilitarian and deadening way. To reduce life to a 'thing' is one of the worst legacies of modernity. Religion had the potential to challenge this but was unsuccessful and in place of this the so-called 'real order must annul – neutralise – that intimate life and replace it with the thing that the individual is in the society of labour. But it cannot prevent life's disappearance in death from revealing the *invisible* brilliance of life that is not a *thing*' (Bataille 1992: 47).

This 'invisible brilliance' can be maintained by the sacred and is the most important element of a society, a binding force which brings about the unity and continuance of society, which unfortunately is now experienced on the margins rather than the centre. This is the tragedy. Mellor suggests that Bataille asks the crucial question, 'How can the sacred (and therefore society) become revitalised again in a world where "God is dead", utility is prized above value and our lives seem more atomised and meaningless than ever before?' (2004: 67). This question (and possible answer) relies on Bataille's understanding that society is essentially a religious phenomenon. Secularization invents a homogenous society dulled in its ways of operation, instilling division rather than unity. Conversely, a heterogeneous society, one made strong through the creative clash of antagonisms, sacred and

profane, restores vitality and life. Secularization is the process of minimizing the distinction between the sacred and the profane (i.e., religion as another world), but lowering the polarity results in a devitalized society. A vital society embraces the heterogeneity that threatens its order and stability and in so doing releases the true nature of those forces which brings it into being in the first place.

What the sacred represents is undifferentiated continuity – evident in the condition of animals '*in the world like water in water*' (Bataille 1992: 19). The sacred promises a movement towards lost intimacy and continuity but also threatens the profane world of consciousness, difference and utility. The purpose of religion should be to express the human yearning for a return to undifferentiated continuity and to provide the means through which this becomes possible. Homogenous secular life reduces the world to subject/object, betraying any notion of intimacy. However, some elements of religious ritual are the nearest means to regaining this lost intimacy and the sacrifice and the festival teach another way of being and living, offering glimpses into another reality, another world. The ritual function of sacrifice is to draw a victim from utility and return it to the intimacy of sacred continuity:

> When the offered animal enters the circle in which the priest will immolate it, it passes from the world of things which are closed to man and are *nothing* to him, which he knows from the outside – to the world that is immanent to it, *intimate*, known as the wife is known in sexual consumption (*consumation charnelle*). (1992: 44)

The sacrificer declares: '*Intimately*, I belong to the sovereign world of the gods and myths, to the world of violent and uncalculated generosity …' (1992: 44). And later Bataille adds,

> I withdraw, you, victim, from the world in which you were and could only be reduced to the condition of a thing, having a meaning that was foreign to your intimate nature. I call you back to the *intimacy* of the divine world, of the profound immanence of all that is. (1992: 44)

Bataille continues, 'As a matter of fact, killing in the literal sense is not necessary. But the greatest negation of the real order is the one most favourable to the appearance of the mythical order' (1992: 45), and 'To sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give ... What is important is to pass from a lasting order, in which all consumption of resources is subordinated to the need for duration, to the violence of an unconditional consumption' (1992: 48–9).

Death teaches us the meaning of life and the way back to intimacy: 'That intimate life, which had lost the ability to fully reach me, which regarded me as primarily a thing, is fully restored to my sensibility through its absence' (1992: 47). Sacrifice, writes Bataille, 'is made of objects which could have been spirits, such as animals or plant substances, but have become things and that need to be restored to the immanence whence they come, to the vague sphere of lost intimacy' (1992: 50). He adds,

> the basic problem of religion is given in this fatal misunderstanding of sacrifice. Man is the being that has lost, and even rejected, that *which he obscurely is*, a vague intimacy.

> Consciousness could not have become clear in the course of time if it had not turned away from its awkward contents, but clear consciousness is itself looking for what it has itself lost, and what it must lose again as it draws near to it. (1992: 57)

Religion fails to celebrate who we are – beings made for and capable of intimacy. What religion has mistaken for truth is nothing other than a fatal misunderstanding. Because of its potential to restore the sacred, and therefore society, this is even more tragic.

> Religion, whose essence is the search for lost intimacy, comes down to the effort of clear consciousness which wants to be a complete self-consciousness; but this effort is futile since consciousness of intimacy is possible only at a level … where clarity, which is the effect of the operation, is no longer given. (1992: 57)

He continues,

> Of course, what it has lost is not outside it; consciousness turns away from the *obscure intimacy* of consciousness itself. Religion, whose essence is the search for lost intimacy, comes down to the effort of clear consciousness which wants to be complete consciousness: but this effort is futile, since consciousness of intimacy is possible only at a level where consciousness is no longer an operation whose outcome implies duration, that is, at the level where clarity, which is the effect of the operation, is no longer given. (1992: 57)

This obscure intimacy religion should have sustained.

The sacred becomes a threatening force for the restricted economy, the world in which we live. It promises to expose what that profane world is – a dupe, composed of an army of 'things', which lends credence to discontinuity and is profligate in its recommendations of a safe and productive environment. For Bataille, the sacred is the effervescence of life that tears away the veneer of isolation to reveal the memory of lost communal intimacy. Although the arts – dance and poetry, music and the different arts – contribute to a letting loose, consciousness subordinates all possibilities of consumption and it becomes reduced to the confines of a reality of which it is the exact opposite. In contrast, the festival offers a creative tension of polarities: the 'tension' between destruction and life:

> There is an aspiration for destruction that breaks out in the festival, but there is a conservative prudence that regulates and limits it ... all the possibilities of consumption are brought together: dance and poetry, music and the different arts contribute to making the festival the place and the time for a spectacular letting loose ... distinctions melt in the intense heat of intimate life. (1992: 55)

The profane world is preferred to the excesses of the sacred world, with community and intimacy being overthrown. Sacrifice can be a way of appeasing humanity's guilt at making things and festival can become a means of restoring a forgotten intimacy. The luxury of the profane world, called an 'accursed share' by Bataille, is temporarily pushed back by sacrifice and festival. The hope of a renewed communal spirit is released by the sacred, the possibility that our selves need not live in isolation and apart from the environment in which we exist. The sacred aspects of our being and living might one day be restored. 'But man is afraid of the intimate order that is not

reconcilable with the order of things' (1992: 20). As a consequence, the order of war and empire is evident. Reason administers this 'thing' and morality is nothing more than the extension of reason, placing good within a framework of utilitarian calculation.

A healthy society never suppresses the sacred. But because of its formidable forces it is pushed to the margins away from common language and experience. Its threat entails its own marginalization. The sacred can never be grasped by language or reason and therefore destabilizes the normative realm. This is one offer of hope to freedom since the sacred can never be reduced to a servile thing. It is necessary to become 'suspended in the beyond of oneself', where communication becomes possible and the isolated self is annihilated.

Bataille argues that what is essential to society is the encounter with something that 'causes one to tremble with fear and delight' (Mellor 2004: 99). And this is the sacred, a phenomenon which has been relegated to the margins. Sacramental participation is nothing other than starting to belong to a different order, one that has erected a divide between the social order and itself. The Eucharist is the consumption of the scapegoat, the one who has been banished to the margins and then done violence upon. But, as Eagleton notes in his work on tragedy, on 'actually eating the body of the scapegoat … one proclaims a solidarity with what the social order has rejected' (2003: 283).

Looking at 'the Face of Faces' – the Face of Beauty

As I suggested in Chapter 3, the image and icon in the Middle Ages possessed a 'corporeal gaze' which had the power to affect the disposition of the worshipper. I now want to extend this discussion in more detail with particular reference to those theologians who have focussed on the beautiful face of Christ and its impact on the anagogic ascent. The fourteenth-century theologian Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa speaks about the beautiful face of God as a visage which releases an affective movement of self-recognition in relation to the divine. Like any mysteriously hypnotic and attractive face, the look of God follows us: 'In seeing me you, who are the hidden God, give yourself to be seen by me' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 99). Such reciprocal seeing is different from ordinary seeing, for when we see such a face we also see ourselves, because it sees its own face there. *This* face is beautiful and gives form to every other form of beauty: 'Your face, Lord, has beauty and this having is being … absolute beauty itself, which is the form that gives being to every form of beauty' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 100). It looks with love and the more one looks back in love the more one experiences this same emotion.

The best way of glimpsing this face of faces, according to Nicholas of Cusa, is to move into a place of contemplative silence, where the face becomes more unveiled, whereby one might enter 'into a certain secret and hidden silence beyond all faces …' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 100). Such a venue reveals the face to be beyond veils and in trying to gaze at the light unveiled, one learns to look beyond all visible light, because any such light is less than what it seeks. The way forward is to leap across 'this wall of invisible vision to where you are to be found ... But this wall is both everything and nothing. For you, who confront as if you were both all things

and nothing at all, dwell inside the high wall which no natural ability can scale by its own powers' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 100). Conversely, those who conceive and attempt to construct their own faces are removed from your face, since although every face has beauty, none has absolute beauty.

Williams's thoughtful reflection on the medieval orthodox icon *Hodegetria*, 'she who shows the way', reflects this idea (2002). Mary holds the child Jesus in her left arm and points to Him with her right. The gestures and features of the body are deliberate and absorbing. Williams suggests that one of the most interesting features of the icon is the way the eyes are drawn in by the gestures and lines (2002: 3). In this sense all icons show us a route to be taken, a way through to appreciating the beauty of God. The lines point us to Christ whose eyes in turn look to us. The image suggests movement, with our gaze always being moved further on and deeper into the mystery of God. It is never a matter of resting on a definitive image where our search is ended, but always moving to a place pointed towards. Christ's gaze reassures us that we are worth looking at by Him who is love. Even though we forget to look upon Him, He never forgets to gaze upon us. The challenge is to see Oneself as Christ sees and to move out of our own and other people's preconceptions of who we are: 'If the love that affirms and transfigures me has no need of my anxious performance, I have no need to hide my face. If God is not ashamed to be my God, I need not be ashamed to show my face' writes Williams (2002: 17–18).

Announcing the Beauty that Saves the World

The Roman Catholic Cardinal, Mario Martini, takes up a similar theme in relation to the mission of the Church. The face of suffering and disfigurement 'from whom others hide their faces (Is 53:3)' (2000: 38) is the face of Christ that looks upon us with an unconditional look of love. It is the task of the Church to be a similar icon of loving seeing, an ecclesial face of beauty that helps us to see beyond the disfigured face. When the Church of Love lives in full its identity as a community gathered together by the 'beautiful Shepherd' in divine charity, it offers itself as a living 'icon' of the Trinity and 'announces the beauty that saves the world' (Martini 2000: 422). The Church expresses this beauty through its liturgy: 'In the Church the beautiful shepherd speaks to the hearts of each one of his sheep and makes the gift of life for us present in the sacraments' (2000: 42), and 'The Beauty which saves, unveils itself in the mystery of Christ, culminating with Easter: the Eucharistic celebration is its memorial' (2000: 50).

Aesthetics has a central role in this, especially its architecture and iconography. The 'arts should be an arrow launched at our inner being through the language of beauty, something which acts as an aid to contemplation' (Martini 2000: 52). This contemplative way of seeing cannot be divorced from the striving or the path itself since vision is inseparable from practice. As we move towards an unveiling of the light the eternal Word at the same time unveils the deceits of the world, those deceits which are made clearer as we move along the path (Martini 2000).

Ford's examination of the 'worshipping self' also postulates the notion of a re-configuration of the self with reference to the notion of the beautiful and glorified 'face': 'Worship inspired through being loved and delighted in by God also refigures

the self-esteem of the worshipper' (1999: 100). Drawing on Ricoeur, he argues that in the experience of being 'recognized' in worship, a series of worship-related practices are opened up (e.g., attentiveness, repentance, gratitude, delight, prophetic discernment), besides an exchange between the esteem of the self and the esteem of others. The theme emphasized throughout his book – the transformation of the self in worship – includes a discussion of the transcendence and intimacy of God in liturgical expression: 'Ricoeur's move through Kant's universal norm to the particularity that makes an exception of every face is recapitulated in worship which recognises God as creator of all, legislator of all, and simultaneously in the most intimate relationship of love with each' (Ford 1999: 100–101).

Ford wants to argue how the face of God is related to worship. Just as going up to the temple was a way of seeking the face of God, so now in worship we encounter that same face. The seeing of God's face is associated with our desire of God, with a meeting of the desire of his people (1999: 198). And in the crucifixion the hidden face of God becomes prominent with associated themes of God's absence, rejection, forgetting, silence, remoteness and abandonment expressed most agonisingly in the psalms and in particular, 'Why dost thou hide thy face? Why dost thou forget our affliction and oppression' (Ps 44:24). The face which is sought is also the face which is absent. But, with absence comes presence and excess. The love of God experienced in worship denies any counter-prevailing claim that life is hopeless and gives witness to 'an economy of superabundance' (Ford 1999: 100), which entails a soteriology of abundance often centred around the 'singing self'. Time in worship is transformed by being filled with gratitude and praise and everything is drawn together in Christ as worshippers' gratitude is expressed in 'non-identical repetitions' (1999: 123). The faces of others become changed through such praise.[1]

Jean-Luc Marion – the Idol and the Icon

Finally in this chapter I wish to discuss Jean-Luc Marions's theology (1995), in order to clarify further my discussion of the icon versus the idol, a theme already touched upon. Marion postulates a 'God without Being' re-situating it within a dynamic of revelation which emphasizes 'gift' as 'excess'. He argues that for too long theology has concerned itself with the notion of 'Being'; love, which has been relegated due to this, needs to become its central concern again. Tracy comments that the book offers 'highly original reflections on such categories as "face" , "excess", "gift" ,

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1   Pope Benedict XVI's words about the face of Christ as the movement into authentic self-identity during his inaugural address at the installation of his papacy addressed similar themes:

This face is the face of the lamb and the symbol of the pallium placed on the shoulders of a Pope symbolising that he takes on God's yoke which is God's will … does … not weigh us down … God's will does not alienate us even if this can be painful – and so it leads us to ourselves. (Pope Benedict XVI 2005)

The face of the lamb reveals to us our own face, since who we are and what we are destined to become can only be found in His will which is revealed in His image. Looking on Him invites a self-looking which leads to our happiness and fulfilment as we are carried to the waters of life.

"idol", "agape" , "onto-theo-logy" and "goodness" over "Being"' (Marion 1995: xii). Let us consider some of these in more detail.

What is an idol according to Marion? It is like the function of an invisible mirror – the secular gaze approaches the mirror and the mirror as an idol reflects back the look so that the gaze never transcends itself; the idol never revealing itself as an idol. Marion writes,

> The idol thus acts as a mirror, not as a portrait: a mirror that reflects the gaze's image, or more exactly the image of its aim and of the scope of that aim. But the idol does not at once manifest its role and status as mirror ... That the mirror remains invisible, since the visible dazzles the gaze, makes it so that the idolater never dupes, nor finds himself duped: he only remains – ravished. (1995: 12)

In contrast, the icon does the reverse. It displaces our own limited gaze and transforms it beyond its own measure to date:

> the icon displaces the limits of our visibility to the measure of its own – its glory. It transforms us in its glory … and by dint of being saturated beyond itself from that glory, becoming strictly, though imperfectly, the icon of it: visibility of the invisible as such. (1995: 22)

The icon advances a 'distance of infinite depth' whereby 'the visible becomes the visibility of the invisible only if it receives its intention, short, if it refers … to the invisible. Visible and invisible grow together and as such: their absolute distinction implies the radical commerce of their transferences' (Marion 1995: 23). Idolatry 'measures the divine according to the scope of a gaze that freezes', whereas the icon 'as it summons to infinity – strictly – contemplation in distance – could not but over-abundantly subvert every idol of the frozen gaze – in short open the eyes of the frozen gaze (as one opens a body with a knife) open its eyes upon a face' (1995: 24). The idol only gathers 'foreign brilliance' whereas the icon 'unbalances human sight in order to engulf it in infinite depth' (1995: 24).

Marion suggests that 'Contemplating the icon amounts to seeing the visible in the very manner by which the invisible that imparts itself therein envisages the visible – strictly, to exchanging our gaze for the gaze that iconistically envisages us' (1995: 21). Referring to St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians 3:18 he comments,

> As an astonishing sequence from St Paul shows, 'We all, with face unveiled and revealed … serving as optical mirror to reflect … the glory of the Lord, we are transformed in and according to his icon … passing from glory to glory, according to the spirit of the Lord.' (1995: 21)

This occurs because 'our gaze becomes the optical mirror of that at which it looks only by finding itself more radically looked at: we become a visible mirror of an invisible gaze that subverts us to the measure of its glory' (Marion 1995: 22). It is 'saturated from beyond itself with that glory' (1995: 22) and becomes an exchanging of our gaze for the gaze that iconically envisages us.

Marion's understanding of the icon is illuminating. The gaze of the idol is a weary gaze, a superficial looking, an inability to see beyond the surface which simply reflects

back the human countenance. The icon, in contrast, is the thing that is saturated with God's love and reflects the glory of God's distance within the finite. The glory of the icon is able to saturate 'the visible without ceasing to be the gaze that both comprehends us at a distance and draws us into itself at a distance' (Hart 2003: 239).

Worship's Seeing with an Iconic Gaze

In seeing the icon we find ourselves more radically looked at as the icon penetrates who we are in relation to its face. Ford points to one interpretation with which I have sympathy:

> To worship in faith before this face is above all to be faced by him. Whatever refers us to this face – whether the faces of fellow human beings, or the imagination aroused by scripture and worship, or works of art, or joyful responsibility, or the 'face of the earth' – is seen with an iconic, not an idolatrous gaze: it leads us to 'see' Jesus Christ only to find ourselves, as Marion observes, 'more radically looked at'. (1999: 214)

Marion wants to free theology from a metaphysics of 'Being'. Theology is to do with faith and love and must fix the attention on the relation of the believer to the crucified. It 'has missed its own authentically theological status by usurping, under the apparently inoffensive title of anthropology, the strictly phenomenological (hence philosophical) task of an analytic of *dasein*' (1995: 66). For Marion, Heidegger's philosophy conceals God within a discourse of *dasein* and the thought of God is eliminated for the thought of being. He accepts the ontological difference but substitutes the name Love for being (Hart 2003: 237). Things of beauty only escape the 'dull blow of vanity' when love exists. The ordinary is transfigured by love: 'the cobblestone that one passes, a child's sleigh … the being matters little, provided that it stems from a love to which, in any case, it will remain foreign' (Marion 1995: 138). Marion sums up his approach: 'Only love does not have to be. And God loves without being' (1995: 138).

Marion's insistence on the primacy of love is persuasive, but in his emphasis on the icon versus the idol, he succumbs to an understanding of the world as divorced from God's radiance and glory, presenting the divine as utterly different from created 'being'. This is Marion's weakness as he fails to see in all created being any signs of God's love and glory (Hart 2003). Hart recognizes rightly that 'Being is always already light, form, beauty – because God, who is beautiful, is the source of all being, God *is* as Trinity' (2003: 238–9). Marion, therefore, divests ontology of love, mistakenly divorcing the two. In stripping being of its beauty and glory, he fails to see that love is in fact ontological and that Love itself created beings to be.

In this chapter I have outlined the importance of beauty for the liturgy of the future by emphasizing its potential to release a movement of desire and return to the One who is the source of beauty. If worship is to do justice to the God it serves, then its ritual spaces must become arenas of desire and yearning, stimulating a ceaseless ascent to the beauty of the unknown, a journey of *eros* towards an unlimited horizon which hinges on the paradox of journey and rest, as outlined by Gregory of Nyssa. In the next chapter I extend this notion by focussing on the silent mystery at the heart of this liturgical endeavour.

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Chapter 5

The Movement towards Silent Mystery

The Silent Mystery

The soil in which Christianity became embedded was familiar with and inevitably influenced by pagan mystery religions. The mystery cults of Eleusis, Attis, Isis and Mithras offered their initiates (*mystes*) access to the divine by means of ritual acts and were expected not to divulge any knowledge revealed and to take vows of silence to which they must adhere fervently (Bouyer 1990; Hederman 2002: 15–16). The Greek noun *mysterion* is associated with the verb *myein*, which literally means to close the eyes or the mouth. Indeed, during the initiation rites of the mystery religions, candidates were first of all blindfolded and then led through a maze of intricate passages before suddenly having their eyes opened. They would then be able to see the secret emblems of the cult and move a step closer towards the truth, an experience which had previously been hidden from them (Ware 1998: 15). Mystery, therefore, always maintained connotations with a sense of disclosure and a compelling entry into the secret darkness of Truth, a movement into the unfathomable and life-changing nature of revelation. Although, generally speaking, Christian writers had little admiration for such cults, many absorbed and reshaped their ideas.

St Paul uses the terminology of secret knowledge when describing the mission of the Church as an unfolding of the mystery (Eph. 1:10), seeing the mystery of Christ in terms of cosmic eschatology and mystery of love (Louth 1991: 21). He speaks about such mystery as being revealed 'to principalities and powers' (Eph. 3:10). This mystery of which Paul speaks is revealed in the Incarnation and part of 'a plan of God for the salvation of the world, which had been hidden in the depths of the divine wisdom, inaccessible to man, until it was to be proclaimed to the whole world in the gospel' (Bouyer 1962: 93). Salvation only comes about when the light of this mysterious knowledge shines in the hearts of the initiated and a movement into mystery starts to begin. It was not until the fourth century that the Greek word for mystery became 'sacrament', which referred mostly to baptism and the Eucharist.

In Roman Catholicism, the liturgy is always spoken of in terms of the priestly and mysterious office of Christ. The sacraments graft humanity into 'the paschal mystery of Christ' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 6, in Flannery 1992: 46) and participants 'receive the spirit of adoption as sons "in which we cry Abba Father" (Rom. 8.15) and thus become true adorers as the Father seeks'. Christ is 'always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7, in Flannery 1992: 46) and by his power he becomes present in the sacraments. When someone is baptized it is Christ who baptizes. In the great work of liturgy, 'Christ always associated the Church with himself' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8, in Flannery 1992: 46). Worship, therefore, is the primary means through which believers express

in their lives the mystery which is Christ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2, in Flannery 1992: 46) and is based on the New Testament principle that all things have been personalized into the mystery of Christ, the Word made flesh. As Taft rightly contends, 'Everything in sacred history – every event, object, sacred place, theophany, cult – had quite simply been assumed into the person of the Incarnate Christ' (2003: 36).

Part of the Church's theological and liturgical task is to hand on, celebrate and encourage contemplation on this mystery of redemption. For example, during the penitential rite of the Roman Catholic mass, the priest says, 'My bothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate *the sacred mysteries*, let us call to mind our sins' (*Sacramentary*, 1985: 360, my italics). For Pope John Paul II, 'The very heart of theological enquiry' itself is 'the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God' (quoted in McBrien 2000: 9).[1] Hederman, too, argues that this celebration of the handing on of the mystery, often referred to as the 'tradition' of the Church, is always in relation to the person of Christ who embodies in Himself the mystery of revelation. The silent turning towards the God of love through Christ is always the most reliable means of knowing this mystery: 'The silence is our turning towards the great abyss of divine love, towards which every scrap of revelation, every detail of tradition, points' (Hederman 2002: 19). The details of tradition, whether primarily biblical or liturgical, is the beginning of the movement back to the Father, since those elements which have been handed down to us in liturgy and Scripture have been 'hewn from the great silence itself' (Hederman 2002: 19). Louth, too, comments on how the liturgy always entails a sense of movement and return to the Father; it is 'the movement, of the Son sent into the world for our sakes to draw us back to the Father. And it is this movement that the liturgy, with its dramatic structure, echoes and repeats' (Louth 1989: 89).

The incomprehensible mystery of God as communicated by the Holy Spirit, primarily through the symbols, images and texts within the liturgy of the Church, become the method by which we hear, see and receive the Truth: 'Tradition is no more or no less than the life of the Holy Spirit in the church communicating to each one of us as persons, bestowing on us the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the light which is divine' (Hederman 2002: 20). Tradition is simply another way of speaking about the inner life of the Church by which individuals become transformed into the likeness of God (Louth 1989: 88). For St Paul, that

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1   Pope John Paul II also writes that 'The approach to this mystery begins with a reflection upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death, a mystery issuing into his glorious Resurrection and Ascension … From this vantage point the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's *kenosis,* a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return' (1998: 136–7). Underhill reminds us, too, that 'nothing in the cultus has absolute value for itself alone. Its value lies first in its suggestive quality, its power to express or evoke the mysterious … and unite in one adoring action worshippers of many different types' (1936: 114). Duffy in his assessment of pre-Conciliar Catholicism also points to the centrality of mystery and its relationship to holiness: 'Catholicism was also mystery; the competent mutter and movement at the altar, the words of power half-understood, the sense of being in touch, with holy things, with Holiness itself' (2004 :15).

tradition always involves a moral and transformational dimension and is intertwined with the sacrificial offering of the self to God. He implores Christians to offer their 'very selves to Him; a living sacrifice consecrated fit for His acceptance; this is your authentic worship (Romans 12:1)' (quoted in Taft 2003: 37). The language of worship for St Paul is always associated with a life of self-giving, modelled on the person of Christ.

Liturgy and Scripture, then, are vital constituents necessary for handing on the tradition and always point to that silence which is the divine presence and which can never be fully known or articulated. As Davies notes, 'The transcendent, unoriginate and infinite God who is one with the silence, who is the silence, chooses to break that silence by speaking language mediating the power and presence of God …' (2002: 203–204). St Ignatius of Antioch called Christ '"the word that came out of the silence" of the Father' (quoted in George 1994: 9). The use of reverential action, stylized gesture, movement and image in liturgy opens itself up to this silent, unlimited horizon (Torevell 2000b). As Louth comments. 'By the fact that it goes beyond speech, it impresses on us the importance of the inarticulate … If Scripture is the word, the voice, the utterance, then tradition is in contrast the silence' (1983: 91). The silence experienced is a foreknowledge of that ultimate silence towards which all participants are striving. For Rahner, as I shall show later in this chapter, it is the encounter with the mystery of the world and its inseparable relationship to liturgy, which allows such a movement to begin towards that inexpressible silence.

For the Neoplatonic tradition and the later Christian monastic Fathers and Mothers, silence entailed a movement away from passion and a return to the incomprehensible mystery of transcendental love. As George informs us, 'The ascetic–monastic movement transformed the negation of speech in theology into a positive spirituality around *hesychia* or inner stillness' (1994: 59). Christian monks and nuns have always interpreted silence as a way of passing through the sensuous distractions of the world towards that which is eternal. If the Word is to be contemplated, then a movement back from language towards silence must be sought. The revelatory breaking of the silence by the Word incarnate is the start of the return to the One Silence, and the acceptance of the provisional character of our attempts to define God is a way of indicating divine transcendence and of pointing to God's 'inexhaustible fecundity, the very opposite of frustrated speechlessness' (Jantzen 2004: 284).

Silence crosses the boundaries of the visible and invisible, audible and inaudible, allowing the resounding silence of the Word to take root and be heard in the heart.[2]

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2   Jasper notes that those who sought the silence of the desert were haunted by powerful biblical images – the lost Eden of Genesis 3:23 and the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21. Here is a Janus-faced image looking back to a time of innocence and to a future peace. The silence re-awakens this dynamic. The 'forgotten dream is remembered and realized and then this unitive process becomes a kind of feasting in the desert' (2004: 45). He comments on how de Certeau's *The Mystic Fable* records how a new place was opened up for some and for others a non-place for a new kind of reason: 'The journey is an endless restlessness that becomes its place of origin and ultimate destination, its still moving point' (2004: 50). The journey into the desert 'demands a detachment and silence that realizes and is realized by a purely oxymoronic language, a language that feeds on otherness which in its abysses and pitiless horizons, become a theatre of memory painfully assembling the fragments of lost unity'

Engaging with mystery, it allows itself to be given most readily to ritual and cultic forms which are able to disclose its Truth. As Davies points out, 'It becomes coterminous with the hiddenness of truth, and thus, in its cruder forms, supports a hierarchy of those who dispose over its secrets' (2002: 209). After Greek tragedy's emphasis on silence as concealing truth, Christian rites developed a tradition of cultic silence which allowed a hierarchy of privileged initiates to absorb and understand the hidden depths of revelation (Davies 2002: 209). Participation in cultic forms, crucial to the movement of return, is assisted through silence which deepens the meaning of word and sign. As Pope Benedict XVI has commented, when referring to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, real *participatio actuosa* in the Church's liturgy must always entail an element of communal silence which allows worshippers to abide in the divine presence:

> In silence, together, we journey inward, becoming aware of word and sign, leaving behind the roles which conceal our true selves. In silence man 'bides' and 'abides'; he becomes aware of 'abiding' reality ... Liturgy's tension, tautness does not come from 'variety' … but from the fact that it creates a space in which we can encounter what is truly great and inexhaustible …' (Ratzinger 1986: 72)

Darkness, Mystery and Secrecy

This notion of mystery, secrecy and disclosure is particularly prevalent in parts of St John of the Cross's writings. Drawing from Denys's understanding of mystical theology, he regards any knowledge about the objective mystery of God as wisdom (John of the Cross 1987: 114) which is always secret to the intellect which receives it. Gradually the soul becomes accustomed to this disclosure of the light and becomes infused by the work of the Holy Spirit through love. The secret is a refuge and not vulnerable to attack. The movement to the Father, therefore, is always by darkness and secrecy. In the *Ascent* John describes the route to be taken – one of purgation and denial:

> To come to the knowledge you have not
> you must go by a way in which you know not
> …
> And when you come to the possession of the all
> You must possess it without wanting anything.
>   (*Ascent*, 1.13.11, in 1987: 78–9)

It is in Christ crucified that John centres his works. Hidden in this image of suffering lie the most secret mysteries, wisdom and wonders of God. Focus on this, he says, and you will discern far more than you have ever wanted to know. In the Son of God on the cross, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God are present: 'fix your eyes on Him, and you will discern hidden in Him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom, and the wonders of God …' (*Ascent*, 2.22.6, in 1987: 129). Denys's

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(2004: 52). This tradition of prayerful silence around the authentic Word is the beginning of liturgy.

linguistic negation of negation becomes reinterpreted by St John in psychological terms which correspond to Christ's suffering and death on Calvary (Howells 2005: 119). As Howells comments, 'Union with God is found by passing through a state of 'annihilation' which is patterned on Jesus' dereliction on the cross' (2005: 119). The bodily sufferings and death of Christ become internalized as a process of *ascesis* (training) takes place – mental images and old attitudes are abandoned as the soul goes through a 'dark night', but with the assurance that new life will be found, as the resurrection of Christ attests. The secret given is only attained by a struggle and through faith which moves out courageously into the unknown and uncertain. Von Balthasar points out that the soul for St John does not attain the beloved by its own powers but by risking a leap of faith into the open arms of God (1986: 119). For St John nothing less than a complete renunciation of all sensual delights is needed if the light of God is to illumine the soul. It is a call to the cross, and each person must desire to imitate the suffering Christ:

> in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honour and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ. In His life he had no other gratification, nor desired any other, than the fulfilment of the Father's will, which he called His meat and food. (*Ascent*, 1.13. 4, in 1987: 77)

Movement into mystery and silence through the sacramental life of the Church reflects Newman's position. Sacraments were 'mysteries' since they give expression to truths which cannot be formulated by the mind and which always remain signs of heavenly truths. Writing in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, he comments

> The visible world still remains without its divine interpretations; Holy Church in her sacraments and her hierarchical appointments, will remain, even to the end of the world, after all but a symbol of those heavenly facts which fill eternity. Her mysteries are but the expressions in human language of truths to which the human mind is unequal. (Quoted in McIntosh 2002: 149)

But the shaping force of the sacramental economy is the means by which we are formed and moved into the embracing mystery of God, a movement which eludes rational argument. 'And this presence, in Newman's view, becomes available to the one who begins to act, to live concretely in converse with the divine life' (McIntosh 2002: 148).

Newman had studied carefully the Alexandrian and Cappadocian Fathers and had learned to appreciate, through their writings, the importance of the apophatic spiritual tradition. The Christian life always entailed for Newman an ongoing, spiritual journey towards ineffable mystery and a willingness to encounter that which cannot be grasped. 'Rationalist' religion rested on evidences of the kind which only skim the surface. In his University Sermon entitled 'The Nature of Faith in relation to Reason' he highlights the importance of 'that instinctive apprehension of the omnipresence of God' which comes about through 'a sacramental formation in holiness rooted in mystery' (quoted in McIntosh 2002: 145). Sillem argues that one of the sources for Newman's philosophy was Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Painting and the Fine Arts*, delivered before the Royal Academy in 1786. 'In

Reynolds' view, the formation process for perception is cumulative and existential; it shapes the personal character in ways that give one the capacity for intuitive insights beyond the more pristinely deductive process of analytical reason' (McIntosh 2002: 147). The aesthetic and spiritual patterns of formation are parallel in this respect, a theme I shall pursue in Chapter 6.

Having introduced the relationship between mystery, silence and ritual, I now move on to discuss the work of two theologians – Maximus the Confessor and Karl Rahner – who, though split by centuries and locations, have highlighted how the liturgical ascent towards divine mystery is none other than a process of deification, a theme which needs to be re-captured in discussions about the worship of the future.

Maximus the Confessor and the Liturgical Apophatic Tradition

Maximus, known as the Confessor due to his courage and faith in promoting and defending the doctrine of the two wills of Christ, was born in Constantinople to a wealthy family in 580 CE. He received a thorough education at the University of Constantinople and would have been deeply familiar with biblical texts and the Fathers, in particular, Origen, Gregory Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Denys. He was also acquainted with the pre-Christian Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, Iamblichus and Proclus. After a short period as protosecretary in the court of the Emperor Heraclius, he joined the monastery of Chrysopolis, where he later became abbot. He then moved to the monastery of St George of Cyzicus, from where in 626 he left as an exile (as the Avars, Slavs and Persians advanced on Constantinople) and began to live in North Africa.

In 653 he was arrested on the instructions of the emperor, Constans II, and after a trial was banished for refusing to consent to the heretical doctrine of the one will in Christ. Maximus set forth his position that since will and 'activity' applied to nature as well as to person, Christ must have had both a human and divine will. This was imperative to uphold, since the Patristic notion that whatever is not assumed in the Incarnation was not healed through the redemption, would have been disregarded and as a consequence, humanity's will would not have been restored (Pelikan 1985: 4). He was later condemned and his tongue and right hand cut off. Maximus died a martyr's death in exile in Lazica in 662.

A key to understanding Maximus's courageous life and theology lies in his monastic formation, which committed him to a life of 'philosophy', a term best translated as 'monastic spirituality' (Pelikan 1985: 3; Russell 2004: 262). Most of his writings were designed to help monks and lay people progress along the spiritual path. Deification, a word used unreservedly by Maximus, is the goal of this endeavour, a process by which human beings are transformed by the divine into the divine; indeed, it is not unusual for Maximus to refer to Christians as 'gods' (Russell 2004: 264). *Letter* 23/43 contains a strong witness to this – we are made to become partakers of the divine nature 'and sharers in his eternity, and prove to be like him through the deification bestowed by grace' (quoted in Russell 2004: 266).

Maximus was responsible for writing a number of *Commentaries* on the Byzantine liturgy, which ingrained themselves powerfully in the popular imagination of the

people, significantly influencing their understanding of liturgy. Stringer argues that these became part of a 'growing hegemony of specific quasi-monastic or mystical Christian discourses within Byzantium' (2006: 105). In his *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, he spells out his doctrine of deification based on a thorough-going incarnational theology with reference to the notion of *eros* – the *kenosis* of God took place so that the *theosis* of humanity could be realized. Indeed, the most important prayer in the liturgy is the Lord's Prayer since it is able to 'direct us to the mystery of deification …' (Maximus 1985: 118). Unfolding this prayer he reflects on how when Christ becomes 'our leader' he 'sets in movement in us an insatiable desire for himself who is the Bread of Life, wisdom, knowledge and justice' (1985: 118), a theme we have encountered earlier in the theology of St Gregory of Nyssa. By following the will of the Father we become like the angels in their adoration and from there we ascend to the Father of lights, where we are 'sharers in the divine nature' (1985: 118).

The 'mysterious' Incarnation is the means towards the deification of our own nature and Christ makes himself 'food for those whom he knows and who have received from him the same sensibility and intelligence', and in tasting the food they 'know with a true knowledge that the Lord is good, he who mixes in a divine quality to deify those who eat, since he is and is clearly called bread of life and of strength' (1985: 104). But Maximus extends his theology of the Incarnation to include the apophatic/cataphatic dynamic. The Word – flesh and spirit –becomes, for Maximus, a parallel between affirmation and negation and underpins his Christological reading of theological language: 'the one who speaks of God in positive affirmations … is making the Word flesh … But the one who speaks of God negatively through negations … is making the Word spirit, as in the beginning he was God and with God' (quoted in J. P. Williams 2000: 99). They are inseparable and 'So the apophaseis which are the contradictories of the kataphaseis, are in contradicting one another about God amicably combined, to form a complementary pair' (quoted in J. P. Williams 2000: 100). The two natures of theological language follow a Chalcedonian logic and are united in distinction without confusion. Maximus uses the New Testament account of the transfiguration to account for two modes of approaching the divine – 'the apophatic mode of speechlessness and the cataphatic mode of the divine gleaned through its effects' (J. P. Williams 2000: 94). These two strands are part of a whole and, as in Denys, provide an analogical framework for the ascent to God. The language of God, therefore, operates within a *perichoresis* between affirmation and negation, just as Maximus's Christological account of the two natures of the Lord operates without confusion. Although Maximus endorses the supremacy of the negative, the apophatic and the cataphatic modes work in unity, mutually supporting each other.

Maximus suggests that the Incarnation brings about a renewal in nature and heals divisions and rifts, for example between the uncreated and created, the intelligible and the sensible, heaven and earth, male and female (Louth 1991: 24). He also postulates a parallelism between the divisions overcome by Christ in his Incarnation and the divisions in the church building (for example between the nave and the sanctuary):

> The church building itself is, if you like, an eschatological sign, because it does not itself belong to the *eschaton*: there the city will be the city of God and there will be no need to protect the sacred by signs ... The divisions mirrored in the Church are drawn into the

overcoming of division achieved by Christ in the Incarnation, for it is the mystery of Christ, the paschal mystery of His death and resurrection, that is celebrated within the church building. (Louth: 1991 25)

Therefore, the ultimate goal of the movement of the self is its deification. Indeed, 'the mysterious self-abasement of the only-begotten Son' is undertaken 'with a view to the deification of our nature …' (Maximus 1985: 102). Maximus teaches his monks that the recitation and application of the Lord's Prayer is one means towards achieving this *skopos* or goal of human existence –the Prayer contains seven mysteries which are to be appropriated in the movement towards the goal:

theology or knowledge of God, adoption in grace, equality of honour with the angels, participation in eternal life, the restoration of nature inclining toward itself a tranquil state, the abolition of the law of sin, and the overthrowing of the tyranny of evil which has dominated us by trickery. (1985: 103)

The second and fourth mysteries entail a sacramental engagement. The second tells us that we become adopted in grace by baptism and through God's assistance are able to lead a more virtuous life based on the commandments. An exchange takes place, as Russell notes, 'Maximus expresses the fruits of this by a variation on the exchange formula, man's kenosis with regard to the passions responding to God's kenosis with regard to divine power, thus drawing the human and the divine towards each other on convergent courses' (2004 : 268). The fourth mystery – participation in eternal life – refers to how the Word is received as spiritual food through a 'noetic' appropriation, and this clearly refers to the receiving of communion (Russell 2004: 268). The *skopos* of human life can be most fully remembered when we pray the Lord's Prayer, since the movement towards deification enables us realize what we once were in our pre-fallen state and what the kenotic love of God's Son has made us possible to become (Russell 2004: 270). The Son 'conquers the flesh which had been overcome in Adam by brandishing it as an instrument against evil' (Maximus 1985: 104).

Coupled with such an incarnational emphasis lies a strong liturgical orientation rooted in silence. It is only possible to understand the significance of God's descent into human form through faith expressed in worship, in particular, by means of silent adoration. Maximus comments on how it is only faith which understands the Incarnation by 'adoring the Logos in silence' (quoted in Pelikan 1985: 9). Even though he suffered much due to his defence of the implications of the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures of Christ, Maximus knew that such formulations were only ever human attempts to delineate and articulate the Christian faith; it was only as *homo adorans* that a person would move more fully towards knowing God. Liturgical involvement is the most secure path to knowledge. Insistence on this dynamic places Maximus, like Denys, at the centre of what I wish to call the Christian apophatic–liturgical tradition (Pelikan 1985: 7–10)).

The Church's Mystagogy: Ascent as Deification

This liturgical emphasis is also seen in Maximus's text *Mystagogy*. Coming from the same period as his *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, the *Mystagogy* or *Commentary on the Liturgy* weaves together the soul's ascent to God as an experience of movement

out of the distractions of the world towards contemplation of the truth. The divine liturgy is the key to this transformation. His intention in the *Mystagogia* is to supplement Denys's teaching in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and to bring others to the saving work of the Church's liturgy, particularly in the light of the dangerous political events which were unfolding, especially the incursion of the Arabs into the empire in 639 and their capturing of Jerusalem in 635 and Alexandra in 639. In the *Mystagogy* the Church building becomes an image of God, the world and a human being. The Church works for the same effects as God, especially in its desire to work for unity and equality:

> Thus to be and appear as one body formed of different members is really worthy of Christ himself, our true head, in whom says the divine apostle, 'there is neither male nor female, neither Jew nor Greek, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither foreigner nor Scythian, neither slave nor freeman, but Christ is in all of you'. (1985: 187)

The Church is like the world since 'it is one in its basic reality without being divided into parts by reason of the differences between them, but rather by their relationship to the unity it frees these parts from the difference arising from their natures' (1985: 188). For Maximus the 'whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the sensible world in symbolic forms, for those who are capable of seeing this' (1985: 189). The formation of the symbolic mentality is encouraged in his vision: 'Indeed, the symbolic contemplation of intelligible things by means of visible realities is spiritual knowledge and understanding of invisible things through the visible' (1985: 189). The Church is like a person because 'for the soul it has the sanctuary, for mind it has the divine altar, and for body it has the nave' (1985: 190). For example, by means of the 'mind of the divine altar it manifests mystical theology' (1985: 190). Indeed, 'through the altar of the mind he summons the silence abounding in song in the innermost recesses of the unseen and unknown utterances of divinity by another silence, rich in speech and tone' (1985: 190). Having read Denys assiduously (he had before him *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* when he was composing *Mystagogy*), Maximus shows how both names, being and non-being, are to be applied to God reverently but can never fully expound His nature since 'neither is proper to Him because neither represents in any way an affirmation of the essence of the being under discussion as to its substance and nature ... For nothing whatsoever is close to him (1985: 186). It is essential in Maximus's view to posit the limits of theological language and in this regard he found the theology of Denys helpful.

What Maximus is describing in this work is a Christian sacramental experience. He shows how it is predominantly through participation in the liturgy and by entering into the mystery of the Body of Christ, the Church, that one is able to come to a binding knowledge of the mystery. Using language again reminiscent of Chalcedon, Maximus clams that the Church is an agency of union with God: 'As different … by language, places, and customs, all members of the body are made one through faith. God realises this union among the nature of things without confusing them …' (1985: 188). Unity, as in the union of the two natures in the Chalcedon definition, is brought about by each person's ascent to God. This is best described in liturgical terms and it is through worship that a person is raised up with an intense desire for God.

In Chapters 23 and 24 Maximus offers meditations on the soul's ascent to God drawn from analogies with different parts of the liturgy. For example, the entrance of the clergy and people into the church symbolizes the unifying of the senses and the external world, the bishop's descent from his throne, the descent of the Word to earth, and 'by the closing of doors which follows there is effected the passage and transfer of the soul in its disposition from this corruptible world to this intelligible world' and later 'By the divine kiss there is seen the identity of concord and oneness and love of all with everyone and each one with himself first and then with God (1985: 207). In Chapter 24, in particular, Maximus focusses on the work of the Holy Spirit and takes us through the readings, closing of the doors, the kiss of peace, the reciting of the Creed, the movement into the core mystery of the rite, the singing of the *sanctus*, the praying of the Our Father and the reception of communion. As Thunberg notes about this description of the liturgy,

> the first entrance during the Synaxis symbolizes the human exodus out of this world, as seen in its mutually contradictory diversity, through a 'natural contemplation' – of things but also of divine providence – which by the assistance of the angels, leads on to its ('logical') culmination in the Gospel (ie. the revelation of the Logos himself). (1965: 398)

The liturgy, therefore, in its early stages, affords a movement of ascent and contemplation on the mystery of the Incarnation.

Receiving the body of Christ is the climax of the service, a movement which prefigures the final *eschaton* and 'which transforms in to itself and renders similar to the causal good by participation those who worthily share in it' (Maximus 1985: 203). For example, in Chapter 15 he writes,

> The closing of the doors which takes place after the sacred reading of the holy Gospel and the dismissal of the catechumens signifies the passing from material things which will come about after that terrible separation and even more terrible judgement and the entrance of those who are worthy into the spiritual world, that is, into the nuptial chamber of Christ, as well as the complete extinction in our senses of deceptive activity. (1985: 201)

Grace is given and virtue developed in a particular way during the unfolding of the liturgy: 'We see affected in the first entrance the rejection of unbelief, the increase of faith, the lessening of vice, the disappearance of ignorance, the bestowal of virtue' (1985: 207). And then, by receiving the body of Christ, the process of deification accelerates: 'By the holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God' (1985: 207). In the peroration Maximus reiterates how divine likeness will be fostered in those who are merciful towards the needy and receive the life-giving mystery.

As indicated earlier, the Word made flesh is compared to how the two modes of knowledge – the apophatic and the cataphatic – are used to communicate the meaning and significance of the Word. In his *Chapter on Knowledge* he claims,

> The one who is involved in the moral teaching of the Word through rather earthly examples and words out of consideration for his hearers is making the Word flesh. On the other hand, the one who expounds mystical theology using the sublimest contemplative experiences is making the Word spirit … Using absolutely nothing which can be known he knows in a better way the utterly Unknowable. (1985: 156)

The spiritual route is not to hold fast to the Lord here on earth, but to ascend to the Father in order for Jesus not to say what he said to the Jews who remained unconverted, 'I am going where you cannot come' (1985: 157). The journey is a long one, moving from strength to strength and from glory to glory (1985: 164). Maximus, taking his cue from Psalm 120: 5, 6, argues how the soul is a seasoned sojourner and many steps of knowledge have to be taken before the 'tabernacle' can be entered, which becomes filled with voices of exultation and thanksgiving and of 'keeping festival' (1985: 164) –'The voice of thanksgiving is gratitude for the glory of the feasting in wisdom. The sound is the continuous mystical doxology which comes about from both exultation and thanksgiving' (1985: 165).

The Cosmos

For Maximus the process of deification is located within the self and the cosmos with each echoing the other. Christ enters the world and expands his redemptive influence over the world, which allows humanity to return to its source. As Flood argues, since the liturgical and contemplative self is often associated with the ascending self, it is invariably situated within a cosmological framework. Maximus, in particular, wants his listeners and readers to recognize how the Incarnation, the descending of the Word, is mirrored in an ascending of the self; a thickening of the Divine Logos through cosmic expansion (*diastole*) is returned by a contraction or thinning (*sustole*) (Flood 2004: 154; Stringer 2006). He uses a model similar to that used in Hinduism and Buddhism 'which recapitulates cosmology and a cosmological discourse reflected in a psychological one' (Flood 2004: 155). The demons which beset the contemplative lifestyle are the demons which exist in the cosmos, the movement towards the divine image manifest in the angelic forces above the earthly. Cosmos and psychology become intertwined, until the modern period, that is, which clears the skies of such parallels. If there is to be any religious sense of angels and demons left in modernity, it becomes largely internalized (Berger 1972). Cosmology and psychology no longer work in a refracted and interdependent manner – the linkage becomes torn apart. Before this time however,

> A human being is a microcosm facing two ways, outwards through the senses and physical body into the sensible world, and inwards towards God and the intelligible world or transphysical universe. The structure of the created self reflects the structure of the cosmos, and a human being contains both a reflection of the divine and a trace of the fall. (Flood: 2004: 155)

It is interesting to note in this regard, that many Roman Catholic religious orders retained this sense of an echoing of divine arrangements within the earthly realm up to the advent of Vatican Council II. For example, when it comes to the spatial design

of the refectory arrangements of the Dominican Order, the *Commentary* on the 1923 constitution states that,

> The correct order of precedence is a matter of great importance in a religious community. In heaven the celestial choirs are grouped according to rank and order. The saints too occupy places assigned to them. The visible Church on earth regulates minutely the order of her hierarchy, from the humble acolyte to the Vicar of Christ ... Disregard or neglect of this custom would everywhere result in chaotic confusion. (Curran 1989: 113)

In *Chapters on Knowledge* Maximus again endorses an apophatic approach as he comments that it is safer to contemplate without words 'in the soul the one who is, for he consists in indivisible unity and not in the multiple ... It is precarious to attempt to speak the ineffable in verbal discourse …' (1985: 144). It is the one, who like Moses, 'behind the veil', has 'entered the Holy of Holies', that is, He 'who has gone beyond the whole nature of the intelligible and the sensible realities and has purified himself from every particularity stemming from his origin', who can 'encounter God with a soul naked and stripped of representations of him' (1985: 144). It is only when Moses 'pitched his tent outside the camp, that is, having installed his freewill and his understanding outside the visible' that he began his worship of God – 'Having entered the darkness, the formless and immaterial place of knowledge, he remains there to accomplish the most sacred rites' (1985: 144).

In darkness, which is formless, immaterial and incorporeal, an exemplary knowledge of things comes about. Other Moses can enter this state and are able, as a result, to understand things 'invisible to … mortal nature' (1985: 144). Christ 'depicts in himself the beauty of the divine virtues just as handwriting is a good imitation of the beauty of the archetype' (1985: 144). As a consequence, he offers himself to others who wish to imitate his virtues. The will no longer conforms to the things of the world but to those things which foster virtue. Maximus (clearly influenced by Gregory of Nyssa) includes the Moses' account in Exodus to indicate the communication of divine knowledge by means of a darkness of inexpressibility, adding the notion of an increase in the virtues. Moses himself descends and offers himself to those who wish to imitate his new-found virtues. Maximus then proceeds to describe baptism, whereby candidates receive the 'first incorruptibility of the flesh' (1985: 145).

Contemplation, Asceticism and the Purification of the Mind

Maximus decribes how the mind needs to be purified if it is to see the things of the earth as vehicles for the contemplation of heavenly things. There is a sacramental underpinning to the world therefore. Once the process of purification occurs, an inner divine radiance to the world is recognized. Detachment from the things of the world allows this journey to begin. In his *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love* Maximus writes that,

> As a little sparrow whose foot is tied tries to fly but is pulled to earth by the cord to which it is bound, so does the mind which does not yet possess detachment get pulled down and dragged to earth when it flies to the knowledge of heavenly things. (1985: 44–5)

He adds, 'When the mind is pure and takes on the ideas of things it is moved to a spiritual contemplation of created things and makes its way to the knowledge of the Holy Trinity' (1985: 45). The passions which hold sway over the mind must be dissipated: 'The mind which dallies on a thing of sense certainly has some passion about it, such as desire, or sorrow or anger or resentment; and until he disdains the thing he cannot be freed from that passion' (1985: 46).

The mind or heart must be set on heavenly considerations: 'The one who truly loves God also prays completely un-distracted, and the one who prays completely un-distracted also truly loves God' (1985: 46). But Maximus is also well aware of the opportunities both within and without the monastery for 'pure prayer'. The marks of the first type are the drawing away of the mind from the world's considerations, and the marks of the second are the taking over of the mind by the divine light so that a person is only conscious of the brightness of this love (1985: 47). The tempter of all passions is ego-love, which stimulates anger, grief and grudges. Those who dispel the demons are compared to offices within the liturgical hierarchy: 'The one who anoints his mind for the sacred contests … possesses the character of a deacon … The one who illuminates it with knowledge of beings … possesses that of a priest' (1985: 49).

Maximus's theology, like that of Denys, focusses on the divine *eros* which enraptures the mind by prayer and floods it with light whereby it can receive divine impressions from God (McIntosh 1998). It is Christ who sets in motion the desirous movement into the hidden depths of creation. Our humanity is not left behind, however, in any transformation by the movement into the mission of the Son. As McIntosh notes, 'The achievement of Maximus is to set mystical knowledge within the framework of incarnational thought, thus suggesting how it could be truly *human knowledge* while being at the same time a sharing in the unfathomable divine pattern of life' (1998: 61). God shines forth through transformed bodies, minds and feelings. For both Denys and Maximus, new life in Christ is achieved through the everyday struggles of human existence and the rituals of the Church.

The illuminated mind is then capable of a different kind of knowing. However, such advanced knowing must be prepared for, as the mind grows to discern through detachment and freedom the inner principles (*logoi*) of material things (McIntosh 1998: 57). Maximus, deeply influenced by the Dionysian synthesis, expounds his vision of an ascent to truth by means of an appreciation of the hidden and mystical meaning of the created order. The Logos is incarnated not just in Christ but in Creation and the Scriptures and recognized through contemplation. Contemplation (*theoria*) is the means by which this mysterious Incarnation is recognized and known. The Logos speaks through the created world and the challenge, as McIntosh reminds us, is whether 'the mind is free enough (from the intellectual desire to possess everything) that it can pass through the *logoi* of creatures to the mystical presence of the divine Speaking' (1998: 57).

When it is achieved, the summit of detachment brings about a mystical awareness that all human beings are equal and in Christ. The will must be strengthened to attain this point and the importance of right intention might be compared to the Buddhist notion of the ethical motivation underlying the basis of right action: 'For God's judgment looks not on what is done but to the intention behind it' (1985: 52) writes

Maximus. Realizing the weakness of human nature, a prayerful person discerns that even with divine power the movement to glory is always gradual and that it is possible to help others just as God has:

> For he knows that in the same way that God has helped him and freed him from the passions and hardships, so can he help everyone when he wishes, especially those who are striving for his sake … as a good and loving physician he heals in his own good time each one of those who are striving. (1985: 52–3)

Indeed, God has created within each human being four of the divine attributes by which he maintains, guards and preserves creatures: being, eternal being, goodness and wisdom (1985: 64). The first two belong to his essence and the final two to his faculty of will, 'in order that what he is by essence the creature might become by participation' (1985: 64); the first is by nature and the second by grace. To recognize the divine light is to recognize the Trinity which is at the heart of the contemplative self but which is only realized by a stepping out of the self.

Maximus, a liturgist at heart, argues that any substantial 'self-forgetting' can best be achieved through the worship of the Church. The Church mediates between heaven and earth and, like the cosmos, is the Body and icon of God. God is reflected in the universe and in the Church and this is why von Balthasar calls Maximus's understanding of worship a predominantly 'cosmic liturgy', *Liturgie cosmique* (von Balthasar 2003). The liturgy strengthens the imitation of Christ, enabling a life of beauty to be lived, but one where suffering will be an inevitable part.

Maximus encourages his hearers to start an interior journey and to drink from the waters of their own vessels. In *Chapters on Knowledge* he writes,

> The one who through asceticism and contemplation has known how to dig in himself the wells of virtue and knowledge as did the patriarchs will find Christ within as the spring of life. Wisdom bids us to drink from it, saying, 'Drink waters from your own vessels and from your own springs'. If we do this then we shall discover that his treasures are present within us. (1985: 156)

The spiritual life, therefore, involves a movement along a path towards the self's proper end as the practitioner traverses a series of developmental steps or defined path, a *ductus*, whereby spiritual memory replaces past memory. Just like St Augustine, who lived much of his spiritual life building up his strength through right forgetting, so Maximus endorses a similar path. New mental imagery must replace the old. *Curiositas* describes any old, wandering, unfocussed mind which is unstable and fickle and *lectio divina* is the device for the slow incorporation of a new memory –the wisdom of the Church – so that it becomes accustomed to the things of God, what Carruthers calls, 'the interior reading of the book of one's memory' (quoted in Flood 2004: 193).

For Maximus, the reconstitution of the will is the central task of the Christian who must learn to become the image of the Father. The soul's *ascesis*, the movement up to Mount Sinai, will only be achieved by an act of imitation of Christ and must remain repeatedly homeless, never finding a home until it rests in God. In *Chapters on Knowledge* he reiterates this point about the soul being in constant movement

and journeying. The journey is only ended, not by a willed stopping of the quest, but through the blessing and acceptance by God who takes up the soul lovingly. At this final stage it is no less than the remaking of the soul in the divine image.

Incarnation and Silence

Maximus's incarnational emphasis, rooted in St Paul's vision of the Body of Christ, is clear. Christ revealed the 'secret and unknown mystery of the dispensation' (Maximus 1985: 152). He was the messenger of the Father's plan of salvation and it was for us that the Word descended on to earth so that, we too, might become like the archetype when we have 'formed in ourselves every virtue and wisdom' (1985: 152). But when a person remains imperfect and 'insubordinate in not obeying God through the keeping of the commandments' (1985: 154), then Christ too 'must be considered imperfect and insubordinate as related to me and in me' (1985: 154); since we are part of Christ's body my weakness diminishes and cuts him down and we fail to grow up spiritually with Him (1985: 154). It can be argued, therefore, that Maximus developed his apophatic theology by extending Denys's through an incarnational focus. His Christocentrism, a key component of his theological vision, attempts to combine the inexpressible incomprehensibility of God with the reality of the incarnate Word. If for some critics Denys seems to underplay the Incarnation, in Maximus it is clearly restored, since he reintroduces it as the centrepoint of his theological vision.

However, Maximus, like Denys, insists that the highest form of spiritual enlightenment is best realized in silence. He advocates the use of silence to his monastic audience in three areas: liturgy, scripture and personal prayer. Without silence one is never free from mutability; we cannot make our natures 'simple' but we can refrain from speech at times which is inseparable from mutability (J. P. Williams 2000: 102). Williams suggests that Maximus deliberately misses out the *anaphora* and the Eucharistic prayer from his account of liturgy to suggest that such moments can only be dealt with in silence. As he comments,

> A possible reading of Maximus's silence on the central point of the liturgy, then is that it is an enactment of that silence in which the union towards which the liturgy points will be experienced; it is both the silence of everyday practice and an anticipation of the silence in which the practice will be consummated. (J. P. Williams 2000: 102)

Silence is also necessary in the life of prayer and allows God to work on humanity's behalf. He quotes Exodus 14:14: 'The Lord will fight for you and you will keep silent' (quoted in J. P. Williams 2000: 103). Williams also makes the excellent point that 'Just as Dionysius deliberately avoided repeating any of the words of the sacred rite, so Maximus avoids setting the most mystical doctrines or the most holy moments of the liturgy down in texts whose circulation he cannot absolutely control' (1990: 103). The uninitiated will not be able to cope with such things.

But silence also exists in partnership with song and praise and it is through the singing 'One is Holy' that one is able to proceed to the 'unknowable Monad' (Maximus 1985: 200). The paradoxes of the ascent become important to Maximus:

Finally, through the altar of the mind he summons the silence abounding in song in the innermost recesses of the unseen and unknown utterances of divinity by another silence, rich in speech and tone. And as far as man is capable, he dwells familiarly within mystical theology and becomes as such as is fitting for one made worthy of his indwelling and he is marked with his dazzling splendour. (1985: 190)

Rahner: The Mystery and Sacrament of the World

If Maximus's apophatic liturgy and theology of deification is underpinned by an anagogical movement centred largely around an incarnational theology, then Rahner's sheds light on the mystery of the questioning, transcendental self as the site for encountering the divine. I choose Rahner here because his transcendental theology offers a notion of spiritual ascent which is rooted in humanity's existential and mysterious encounters with the world, which in turn, entails the foundation of any legitimate understanding of worship. His theology owes much to Aristotelian empiricism and Aquinas's theory of knowledge, as he shows how the most sublime or transcendent concepts can only ever come about through sense-based intuition. For Rahner, knowledge always entails a 'conversion to the 'phantasm', by which he means acknowledging the inseparability of sense-based and spiritual knowledge; human knowledge without sense intuition is empty and meaningless. Emphasizing, therefore, the importance of the unity of the sensual and spiritual, he writes, 'Hence conversion to the phantasm does not mean intellectual knowledge "accompanied by phantasm" … but is the term designating the fact that sense intuition and intellectual thought are united in *one* human knowledge' (Rahner 1968: 238). This is why he allows his major work, *Spirit in the World*, to be shot through with Aquinas's theology of knowledge. As Viladesau points out, 'The entirety of Rahner's *Spirit in the World* is an explanation of the text from St Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* 1,q.84.a.7, on the question "Whether the intellect can actually know anything through the intelligible species that it has, without turning itself to sensible images (*phantasmata*)"' (1999: 77). Rahner quotes from Thomas at the start of *Spirit in the World* and in so doing also refers to Denys,

> We know the incorporeal (non-worldly), of which there are no phantasms, through a comparison with the sensible, corporeal world of which there are phantasms. Thus we know what truth is by considering the thing about which we perceive a truth. But according to Dionysius, we know God as cause both by way of eminence and by way of negation. And in our present state of life we can also know the other incorporeal (non-worldly) substances only by way of (such) a negation or by some comparison with the corporeal world. Therefore, when we want to know something of this kind (non-worldly), we must turn to the phantasm of the corporeal world, although there are no phantasms of the thing itself. (1968:11)

For Rahner, therefore, sense knowledge and spiritual knowledge always constitute a unity and our purchase on the 'real' can only come about through the our comparison with the material world and by means of its negation, themes I have discussed at length elsewhere. Since matter and spirit are not separate things, it is appropriate to describe matter as 'frozen spirit whose only meaning is to render real spirit possible'

(1969: 177); 'Matter and spirit have a unity in their starting-point, in their history and their goal' (1969: 177).

'The Infinite Horizon'

With this in mind, I move on to discuss Rahner's understanding of mystery in relation to his theory of knowledge. Any realist account of divine knowledge always rests upon acceptance of the mystery of the *deus absconditus*, the hiddenness of God. For Rahner, revelation means that God is the abiding presence in the world and knowledge becomes possible primarily through an experience of the overwhelming mystery of this *deus absconditus*, even when this presence is avoided. He writes:

> In other words the *deus absconditus* is the source of truth for man, which is freely bestowed upon him and determines his identity. Man always stands before the *deus absconditus* even when he tries to look away and refuses to accept the truth that clear knowledge of the reality of the world, which gives him mastery over the world, comes from the *deus absconditus*. Knowledge is primarily the experience of the overwhelming mystery of the *deus absconditus*. (Rahner 1985: 53)

An encounter with mystery is an encounter with Truth: '"*The* Truth" occurs in the basic experience of the mystery itself' and 'the essence of knowledge lies in the mystery which is the object of primary experience and is alone self-evident' (1985: 51). The history of revelation is nothing but 'the growing awareness that we are involved with the permanent mystery and that our involvement becomes ever more intense and exclusive' (1985: 53). Rahner, in postulating such a theory, acknowledges what he terms an implicit 'excessus', by which he means that any grasping of an object automatically includes a transcendence of that grasping. In encountering an object a tacit recognition occurs which endorses the view that there is 'more' to the object grasped and that present knowledge is only provisional – more can be understood at a later stage. This horizon or goal, 'another place' to which our transcendence points, can never be experienced directly, 'the Whither of transcendence is there in its proper way of aloofness and absence. It bestows itself upon us by refusing itself, by keeping silence, by staying afar' (1966: 52). This horizon allows endless possibilities to open up leading to new interpretations and insights about God, the world and the self

Consequently, Rahner's insights concerning the relationship of God to the world, are based upon a dynamism beyond the object encountered which entails a sense of mystery and incompletion, situating his transcendental theology within an apophatic mode of movement towards that which is inexpressible. That to which we are lured can never be defined or conceptualized fully. The only possible knowledge we can have of this reality is through a ceaseless movement of transcendence towards this infinite horizon, a theme we have witnessed already in the history of the apophatic tradition. As Rahner writes,

> But the infinite horizon, the Whither of transcendence cannot be … defined. We may reflect upon it, objectivate it, conceive of it so to speak as one object among others, delimit it conceptually: but, this set of concepts is only true, and a correct and intelligible

expression of the content, when this expression and description is once more conditioned by a transcendent act directed to the Whither of this transcendence. (1966: 50)

God is encountered in the movement towards the 'excess' that we experience in the being of finite objects. But 'The ultimate measure cannot be measured; the boundary which delimits all things, cannot itself be bounded by a still more distant limit … Such an all-embracing immensity cannot itself be encompassed' (1966: 51). Knowledge of God, therefore, always entails a movement towards this inexpressible mystery. Revelation, which is essentially relational and personal rather than propositional, does not eliminate God's mystery but invites us into a ceaseless movement towards it. And this invitation to never-ending journeying opens us to new horizons of understanding and depth.

The existential questionings which beset all of humanity through life are the means of experiencing this knowledge of God's self-gift, which entails a permanent process of growth and discovery. This is an operation of grace. Everyone, due to their humanity, has within them the seed of grace and religious insight. What the Church offers through its corporate prayer life and sacramentality is the assurance and public sign of the promise of this grace centred in the resurrection of Christ (Endean 2004: 15). As Endean comments, this has enormous implications for the dynamic and open-ended nature of Christianity itself: 'It follows that Christianity is permanently growing and in process: Christian fidelity is not a matter simply of preserving a heritage unsullied, but rather of courageous engagement with what is new and strange' (Endean 2004: 16). The sacramental life of the Church builds on this and assures humanity of the grace-given nature of existence. The Church connects with this, makes it explicit and endorses the meaningful mystery of every human being's experience. Rahner's emphasis on the operation of grace in human experience and awareness is always centred around this encounter with new insights and revelations.

Recognizing Human Nature and the Movement of Elevation

Related to this notion is Rahner's postulating of a 'supernatural existential' within humanity, which offers a reconciliatory path between the scholastic notion of extrinsic grace (where grace came from without, superimposed onto nature and at the same time beyond experience) and 'the tendency of the *nouvelle théologie* to centre its theology entirely on intrinsic grace (with its tendency to eradicate the gratuitousness of God's gift)' (Vass 1985: 67). It is 'supernatural' because it entails God's gratuitous self-communication and 'existential' because it is present to everyone everywhere. Human beings are naturally oriented towards God and even when not reflectively aware of this 'existential', lean towards God through their encounter with the hopes, longings and fears of everyday existence. Transcendentality, therefore, is not the static condition of divine sonship given through baptism, but the dynamic movement of *all* humanity in and towards the God who beckons and lures. This is what grace is – the free gift and means by which human beings are elevated towards the unknowable horizon which is the absolute being of God.

Nature and grace cannot be separated for it is impossible within the depth of human living to discern what is of nature and what of grace. For Rahner, as for

Augustine (as I indicated in Chapter 2), all of humanity possesses an infinite longing and desire for God, not simply a *potentia oboedientialis* or non-repugnance to grace (as in the scholastic dualistic understanding of nature and grace). Here all human longing which is an experience of grace becomes a 'horizon of transcendence', which enables a process of elevation (*elevans*) to take place rather than simply healing (*sanans*) (Duffy 2004: 47). This pre-apprehension of the God of grace and a person's dynamic transcendentalism are central in Rahner's theology. But to maintain the gratuity of God's grace, he claims that, theoretically, nature is unaffected by grace even if we have no experience of this 'pure nature'. In accusations about ambiguity in this regard, Rahner acknowledges that grace is extrinsic to a person's ontic nature (meaning in accordance with being) but intrinsic to her ontological make-up (which refers to becoming conscious of what is ontic through daily living). Rahner writes that,

> even when he does not 'know' it and does not believe it, that is, even when he cannot make it an individual object of knowledge by merely inward reflection, man always lives consciously in the presence of the triune God of eternal life. God is the unexpressed but real 'Whither' of the dynamism of all spiritual and moral life in the realm of spiritual existence which is in fact founded, that is supernaturally elevated by God. It is 'purely *a priori*'; Whither, but always there, present to consciousness without being in the nature of an object, but nonetheless there. (1966: 180–1)

Rahner's notion of *Vorgriff* in *Spirit in the World* clarifies further his understanding of transcendence in relation to sensible form. He writes that 'This transcending apprehension of further possibilities, through which the form possessed in a concretion in sensibility is apprehended as limited and so is abstracted, we call "pre-apprehension" (*Vorgriff*)' (1968: 142). Our capacity to hear the revealed Word is part of our human existential, natural make-up which has a pre-grasp (*Vorgriff*) of the excess or God's overwhelming love. The questions which we ask and the struggles which we experience are part of our drawing near to unlimited being: 'To be human is to be in relationship with God' (Marmion and Hines 2005: 3). Human knowledge 'always falls short essentially of its complete fulfilment, which fulfilment is designated by the breadth of its pre-apprehension', but this knowledge is not an 'inconsequential supplementation' but the 'condition of the possibility of any objective knowledge at all' (Rahner 1968: 145). The 'whither' of the pre-apprehension

> can reveal itself only in the consciousness of the pre-apprehension itself as such … knowledge, in the apprehension of its individual object, always experiences itself as already and always as moving out beyond it, insofar as it knows the object in the horizon of its possible objects in such a way that the pre-apprehension reveals itself in the movement out towards the totality of the objects. (1968: 145)

This ecstatic 'moving out' beyond itself amounts to humanity's spiritual existence. Humanity is 'spirit in the world' because of this thrusting elevation to an infinite horizon. The movement is ceaseless and transformational. The 'supernatural existential' not only emphasizes the beings we are but demonstrates that acceptance and recognition of this *Vorgriff* as the key to living a fulfilled life. Knowledge and

experience become intertwined: 'Man is spirit because he finds himself situated before being in its totality which is infinite' (Rahner 1968: 186). And 'He knows of absolute *esse* because he experiences his movement towards *esse*. Therefore, he is spirit. In the fact that he knows of absolute *esse* only in this way, he experiences his finiteness' (1968: 186). Humanity 'is spirit because he finds himself situated before being in its totality which is infinite' (1968: 186).

This notion of a supernatural existential in Rahner not only has significant implications for locating the presence of God within all persons and human situations but points to the constant strivings of every human heart to find an authentic way of living as part of an all-encompassing inclusive theology. As Dych contends, 'Understanding God's gracious presence as a supernatural existential provides one theological way to express the second Vatican Council's optimistic view of the possibility of salvation for all peoples' (1992: 40). Rahner defends his notion of the possibility of universal salvation by his account of the knowing subject. Unlike the copy or image theory of knowledge, which simply postulates the knower as an encounter with an objective reality, he emphasizes a mode of knowledge which involves 'self-presence'. To exist at this level of knowledge and insight is to exist as spirit, where knowledge and being are identical. Influenced by Rousselot and Marechal, Rahner became convinced that there needed to be a balance between the knowing subject and the object encountered in any legitimate theory of knowledge. And he found in this a view of the subject not as passive recipient of external stimuli, but as dynamic spirit, involving a self-presence desiring and opening itself out to an unlimited horizon. What Aquinas referred to as the '*excessus*' of knowledge, Rahner postulates as the 'more' or 'beyond' the sensible realm. This is the transcendental element in our existence. God's grace is not an exclusive gift given to Christians. A transcendental determination pervades all human existence and common humanity becomes the driving determinant in Rahner's theology, echoed in Vatican II's claim, in its *Constitution on the Modern World*, that for Christians 'nothing human fails to raise an echo in their hearts' (Flannery 1992: 36). As Dych reminds us, 'Creation is intrinsically ordered to the supernatural life of grace at its deepest dynamism and final goal. The offer of this grace, then, is an existential, an intrinsic component of human existence and part of the very definition of the human in its historical existence' (1992: 36).

Orientation towards Mystery

Human existence, therefore, constitutes a movement and experience towards that which is the mystery of being beyond all beings. Everyone experiences this encounter, even if they do not name it 'grace' as such; it is a constituent part of humanity's existential experience and defines who we are in our concrete living. A human being is the one who

> understands himself as the one who reaches out beyond the conceptual into the nameless and incomprehensible ... Thus the experience of the nameless mystery as both origin and goal is the *a priori* condition of all categorical knowledge … it is not merely a marginal phenomenon at the end of the road. (Rahner 1985: 52)

Humanity realizes this identity in relation to mystery: 'In the primary realisation of his being (*dasein*) and in the philosophical reflection derived from it, man comes to be himself, and here he does not experience himself as dominant, absolute subject, but as the one whose being is bestowed upon him by the mystery' (1985: 52). Knowledge of God is 'a *transcendental* knowledge because man's basic and original orientation towards absolute mystery, which constitutes his fundamental experience of God, is a permanent existential of man as a spiritual being' (Rahner 1978: 52). All explicit conceptual knowledge of God is always a reflection on 'man's transcendental orientation towards mystery' (1978: 52). There is always 'more than that which we are talking *about* in our words and concepts' (1978: 52); here it must be remembered that humanity's original orientation to God is not to be confused with 'the objectifying, although necessary, reflection upon man's transcendental orientation towards mystery' (1978: 53).

Rahner's exposition continues by suggesting that a person who ignores his transcendental orientation hides from himself and can 'suppress the most real truth about himself' (1978: 54). The way forward, therefore, is to allow oneself to be grasped by, rather than taking control of, the mystery; this is a mystery which is both 'present and yet ever distant' (1978: 54) and the intimacy and transcendence associated with this experience is most likely to take place when one lets go, allowing mystery to make its mark on us in trusting acceptance. One context for this is likely to be 'in moments of prayer and quiet silence' (1978: 54). Rahner wants to call this encounter 'holy mystery' because of its association with love 'at whose disposal we exist and from which we are distanced through our finiteness, but which nevertheless we affirm in our transcendence through freedom and love …' (1978: 66).

In the presence of this holy, nameless and infinite mystery we begin to understand the meaning of worship and prayer. Humanity's feeling of creatureliness is witnessed in the 'prayerful experience' of both our autonomy and our dependence on and orientation towards the absolute mystery. Living a Christian life is essentially about falling into 'the mystery which we call God' (1978: 430). By doing this, she realizes that she is 'falling into a blessed and forgiving mystery which divinises us' (1978: 43). Rahner offers us, therefore, an encounter of God within in our 'ordinary' and yet profound experience of daily living and this knowledge of God has the character of a transcendental experience. As Dych comments, 'Insofar as this subjective, non-objective luminosity of the subject in its transcendence is always orientated towards the holy mystery, the knowledge of God is always present unthematically and without name, and not just when we begin to speak of it' (1992: 44). A universal history of grace is simultaneously a history of revelation. But the elevation of the person to a 'new horizon' always entails the operation of grace within a theory of revelation. This is a theology always rooted in the material and the historical. There can be no horizon unless there is a historical context.

Uncreated grace is nothing other than the self-communication of God. Any future existence living in the glory of God is a flowering of what is already hidden within each human being and any such glorification a process of deification, the gradual flourishing of the self in Christ. The natural human experience of God is always one of movement, the desiring surge of the human to realize something more and deeper than is experienced in the present. This realization of further transcending possibilities, as I have indicated earlier, is called a *Vorgriff*; with this Whither of the

pre-apprehension only revealing itself in the consciousness of the pre-apprehension. Here we have a moving out beyond oneself, an ecstatic movement into depth, which results in an experience of awe in the face of the magnitude of human living, the experience of mystery at the heart of the contingencies of daily living.

The apophatic strain in Rahner's theology is evident in this embracing of the tradition of the Church rooted in God's mystery: 'Rahner's constant references to the categories of mystery are organically part of his intellectual achievement' (Endean 2005: 289). Rahner comments that 'The true system of thought really is the knowledge that humanity is finally directed precisely not toward what it can control in knowledge but toward the absolute mystery as such; that mystery is … the blessed goal of knowledge which comes to itself when it is with the incomprehensible one …' (quoted in Noia 1997: 132). Our questioning and striving receive answers which are always open to subversion and revision:

> The unlimited and transcendent nature of man, the openness to the mystery itself which is given radical depth by grace, does not turn man into the event of the absolute spirit in the way envisaged by the German idealism or similar philosophies; it directs him rather to the incomprehensible mystery, in relation to which the openness of transcendence is experienced. (Rahner 1985: 51–2)

For Rahner, therefore, God is

> that absolute mystery which, whether we want to or not, we always associate at least implicitly in our spiritual encounter of the world with the presupposition and ground of objects and subjects ... God therefore stands as the ground and all-embracing, pre-given unity of the experience of the spirit and the material world in their unity. (1969: 155)

Active transcendence consists in 'becoming': 'Becoming is … always and of its very nature a self-transcendence of the cause, effected by the lower itself; it is an active surpassing of self. This "more" is not simply something added to it from the outside (which would cancel out the notion of a genuine intramundance becoming) …'. It is a staged and gradual process: 'Precisely in the case of an essential self-transcendence, the notion of surpassing oneself always means a partial non-continuity which cannot and may not be avoided if we are not to deny the basically genuine and qualitatively new becoming of being' (1969: 176).

In summary then, we can claim that Rahner's understanding of human nature is rooted in a doctrine of deification: The Christian life consists of a 'flowering' of an already divine nature which is hidden but real. Humanity is called to share in God's transfiguring glory and mystery, which lie at the heart of existence and which are the self-communication of God. Humanity's self-transformation consists in realizing, and acting in relation to this presence. The process involves humanity's deification. As Fischer comments, 'This is the heart of Rahner's theology. God wants to be the centre of human existence, and, in a word, to divinize humanity' (2005: 100; Russell 2004).

Implications for Worship

For Rahner, then, this encounter with the depth of human living is an encounter with God whether we realize it or not. But what are the implications of all this for

the worship of the future? In the light of two conceptual models for God's grace Rahner postulates his theology of worship. The first understands grace as primarily an intervention of God at a definite point in time and space to a secular world otherwise deprived of it. The second starts from the premise that the 'secular' world is always permeated with grace: 'From the outset as ground of nature, grace is the innermost centre of this nature' (Rahner 1984: 143). Nature is never purely secular or 'pure'. In a definitive formulation of the nature of sacraments Rahner writes that, 'The sacraments … are not really to be understood as successive individual incursions of God into a secular world, but as "outbursts" … of the ever present gracious endowment of the world with God himself in history' (1984: 143). The deification of the world occurs not only in the explicit conferring of grace through the sacraments, but whenever humanity accepts himself and 'realizes in freedom his existence as it is, as radically and immediately dependent on God' (1984: 144). Deification, therefore, is not some extraneous imposition onto nature but the free realization that the self and the world exist and depend on a source of love.

Worship, for Rahner, then must be understood as the explicit materialization within the sacral sphere of divine grace which is present everywhere. The two models are to be kept in some kind of relationship, but certainly, argues Rahner, the second model has more substance. On the other hand, it must also be shown that the sacraments do make a difference and rather than rejecting totally one model in favour of another, Rahner's main concern in his theology of worship is to show how some conclusions may be drawn within the second model of grace. He sums up his understanding of the Church's worship in the following words: 'the symbolic presentation of the salvation event which is occurring always and everywhere in the world' (1984: 146). This does not diminish its significance because it presents the 'liturgy of the world' in spatio-temporal terms and conveys an explicit enactment of salvation already in the world. Ecclesial worship makes present and explicit what the world is – a place of hope and love. If human beings cannot discern and experience this divine presence in the world then liturgy will most likely be regarded as a 'strange ritual'. It is urgently required that people are shown how in their daily lives with their fears and joys, grace is found, and how such aspects are made manifest in the celebration of the liturgy.

Rahner, therefore, is always primarily concerned to show how for many people the starting point for an encounter with the divine is found in the 'ordinary routine of daily life' (1984: 148). If the Church's liturgy is to be defended then a clear access to the depths of existence must be found. Once this awareness is found, then worship can be shown to be the 'explicit celebration of the divine depth of their ordinary life' (1984: 149). Only then will liturgy be seen not as *in* the world, but liturgy '*of* the world' (1984: 149).

Worship must connect with this depth of existence if it is to perform its function well. There can be no authentic worship unless such a relationship exists. An implicit liturgy occurs in our lives through the encountering of God in the depth and mystery of human encounters and situations. This is a movement out of and into the depth of mystery and unknowability and it is the experience of the mystery of God whose presence/absence is located in the finite world by which we move into 'another place'. As Rahner notes, knowledge 'is the speech of the being without a

name, about which clear statements are impossible; it is the last moment before the dumbness which is needed if the silence is to be heard, and God is to be worshipped in love' (1982: 52).

In *Foundations of Christian Faith* Rahner argues that being a member of the Church does not radically separate one from the rest of humanity: 'The basic and ultimate thrust of the Christian life consists not so much in the fact that a Christian is a special instance of mankind in general, but rather that a Christian is simply man as he is' (1978: 402). A person is 'appointed by baptism to be a messenger of the word, a witness to the truth, and a representative of the grace of Christ in the world' (Rahner 1978: 416). Through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation the Church expresses and makes manifest what the nature of the individual actually is. One becomes more fully the adopted son or daughter of God. Since the world is already permeated by the grace of God, God's action is seen most clearly at those moments when life is experienced at its most profound and radical. As Rahner puts it,

> It takes place not as a special phenomenon, as one particular process *apart from* the rest of human life. Rather it is quite simply the ultimate depths and the radical dimension of all that which the spiritual creature experiences, achieves and suffers in all those areas in which it achieves its own fullness, and so in its laughter and its tears, in its taking of responsibility, in its loving, living and dying … (1978: 126)

This 'liturgy of the world' is the means for strengthening the sacraments and *vice versa*. It is in the events of the world that the life of the Church will be renewed as it acknowledges the actions of grace by those who suffer, forgive and live life with courage and in relation to its depths and struggles, amounting to a mysticism of everyday things. Such mysticism is world-centred and inclusive. It takes seriously both the vicissitudes of daily toil and joy and the presence of God's grace within those moments. As Rahner notes, 'In all genuine believing, hoping and loving there takes place that self-transcendence, that losing of self, wherein one finds God as the innermost depths of one's experience' (1978: 128). The ecstatic moment is the moment of deepest encounter with the world.

Rahner argues, as a result, that the experience of God

> is not some subsequent emotional reaction to doctrinal instruction about the existence and nature of God which we received from without and at the theoretical level. Rather it is prior to any such teaching, underlies it, and has to be there already for it to be intelligible at all. The experience of God is not the privilege of the individual 'mystic', but 'is present in every man even though the process of reflecting upon it varies greatly from one individual to another in terms of force and clarity'. (Quoted in Skelley 1991: 71)

The nearness of God is the daily experience of life itself – the unavoidable living of human experience. Christianity attempts to lead us into the experience of God's absolute mystery, but because it is so deeply hidden it is not easy to conceptualize it. It is the task of Christianity to point to this basic experience of God and to encourage humanity to discover it within their own hearts.

Liturgy as the Celebration of the Liturgy of the World

Consequently, for Rahner any sacred experience within liturgical forms rests upon a corresponding ability to experience God in the depths of everyday life. Appreciation of the depths of human existence is important for an appreciation of the Church's liturgy. Those who regard the Church's liturgy as unnecessary must first of all cultivate a recognition of the mystery of human life: 'Prior to any defence of the Church's liturgy, for these people in the first place there must be produced a clear access to the depths of their own existence, where God has communicated himself from the very beginning' (Rahner 1984: 148). Liturgy makes explicit the depth and beauty of human life. What is required is a 'mystagogy' – a recognition of the mysterious dimension of human existence, a guiding hand which allows others to see the presence of God in everyday life. This will then assist in seeing worship as 'the explicit celebration of the divine depth of their ordinary life, that what clearly appears in it and consequently can be more decisively accepted in freedom is what occurs always and everywhere in the ordinary course of life' (Rahner 1984: 148). This encounter with the depths of human existence is the beginning of an appreciation of worship and adoration.

For Rahner this emphasis on the existential presuppositions of worship gives more credence to formal liturgical acts not less. Liturgy has to become a celebration of what he calls the 'liturgy of the world' – by this he means it must highlight those aspects of human experience which are pervaded by God's mysterious and loving presence. This is a difficult task since humanity's heart is often dulled:

> This liturgy of the world is as it were veiled to the darkened eyes and the dull heart of man which fails to understand its own true nature. The liturgy, therefore must, if the individual is really to share in the celebration of it in all freedom and self-commitment even to death, be interpreted, 'reflected upon' in its ultimate depths in the celebration of that which we are accustomed to call liturgy in the more usual sense. (1984: 146)

If we are dull to the mystery of the world then we will be dull to its 'liturgical' nature.

Rahner's understanding of worship as 'liturgy of the world' has implications for how we understand and relate to the cosmic dimension. As Skelley notes, 'The whole cosmos is taken up and transformed in our history. Through us the universe receives the divine communication and gratefully surrenders itself back to the absolute mystery' (1991: 98). The liturgy of the world is an action of God through us and therefore depends upon our response and our acceptance or denial of God: 'The liturgy of the Church is the explicit manifestation of the implicit liturgy of our lives' (1991: 101). The ritualized forms of worship are the symbols of the liturgy of the world and reflect a world that is graced and shot through with God's love. The beauty of formal liturgy resides in the beauty of the redeemed world:

> The ecclesial worship is important and significant, not because something happens in it that does not happen elsewhere, but because there is present and explicit in it that which makes the world important, since it is everywhere blessed by grace, by faith, hope and love, and in it there occurred the cross of Christ, which is the culmination of its engraced

history and the culmination of the historical explicitness of this history of grace. To anyone who has … absolutely no experience of the cosmic liturgy, the Church's liturgy could only seem like a strange ritualism … (Rahner 1984: 147)

But the Church must also become an event (*Ereignis*) particularly through its 'altar community' (Farmer 2005: 151). Where 'the Church *acts* – that is, teaches, confesses, prays, offers the sacrifice of the mass, etc., it attains a higher degree of actuality than it does by its mere continuing existence … The church must always again and again become event' (quoted in Farmer 2005: 151).

Symbol and Sacrament in Rahner

In expounding a metaphysics of the symbol Rahner clarifies further his theological and liturgical thinking. A 'real symbol' is always expressive of the ontological reality from which it proceeds. The Logos is the revelatory symbol in which the Father enunciates himself in His Son to the world. On the Incarnation he writes,

> The humanity of Christ is not to be considered as something in which God dresses up and masquerades – a mere sign of which he makes use, so that something audible can be uttered about the Logos by means of this signal. The humanity is the self-disclosure of the Logos itself, so that when God, expressing himself, exteriorises himself, the very thing appears which we call the humanity of the Logos' (quoted in McCool 1975: 127).

This is an ecstatic movement of God – 'in his self-externalization he goes out of himself into that which is other than he' (quoted in McCool 1975: 128). The Church continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world through her sacraments: 'Thus the sacraments are expressly described in theology as "sacred signs" of God's grace that is as, "symbols", an expression which occurs expressly in this context' (quoted in McCool 1975: 129). The Church is the real symbol because it makes present the incarnate Word in space and time. It is the 'primary sacrament of the grace of God, which does not merely designate but really possesses what was brought definitively into the world by Christ: the irrevocable, eschatological grace of God which conquers triumphantly the guilt of man' (quoted in McCool 1975: 129).

Rahner writes about the expressive symbol in relation to the sacraments: 'at no stage can the sign be seen apart from what is signified, since it is understood *a priori* as a symbolic reality, which the signified itself brings about in order to be really present itself' (quoted in McCool 1975: 129). And 'In a word, the grace of God constitutes itself actively present in the sacraments by creating their expression, their historical tangibility in time and space, which is its own symbol' (quoted in McCool 1975: 130).

Assessing Rahner

Purcell argues, I think fairly, that in assessing Rahner the question which remains central is how does the imprecision and ambiguity of the experience of the 'nameless mystery' within everyday living remain equal to the power of the liturgical symbol to excite a movement towards the beyond? If it is a matter of listening and hearing

attentively to discern the mystery of existence, then the deadening muffle of the secular dim might be too strong, even within the existential moment, to release this stepping out into the divine mystery (O'Leary quoted in Purcell 2005: 196). But Rahner finds a way through this phenomenological–transcendental problematic by arguing that the profound surprises of everyday existence and the challenging diversities of human living are enough to release this movement. The alterity of the other is the mystery which informs life. What more is required to locate such experiences within notions of transcendence? Purcell comments, 'Thus is Husserlian phenomenological method exceeded, but on the basis of Husserl, as the concrete experience of the other perturbs a consciousness for which the theoretical is existentially inadequate and incomplete' (2005: 207–8). If such phenomenal and existential emphases for locating the divine open Rahner up to accusations of a dangerous 'subjective turn', then one might look more carefully at Rahner's later writings.

By the time he writes *Foundations of Christian Faith* in 1976, Rahner is able to withstand criticisms of theological subjectivism as he becomes more concerned about the complexity of the one who hears and receives revelation. His emphasis is less on the *ego cogito* and more on the dialogical movement of the person, the dynamic between two mysteries, the self and the divine Other (Purcell 2005: 201). Purcell persuasively demonstrates that in *Hearer of the Word*, Rahner salvages any criticism about lack of intersubjectivity by focussing on the *hearer* of the Word rather than simply the transcendental subject. The passive recipient rather than active seeker is emphasized: 'The solitary subject seeking within itself the transcendental source of its question becomes the one that discovers itself *always and already to be*, prior to its own initiative, the subject of an address' (Purcell 2005: 201). Exteriority is affirmed in relation to its impact on interiority. Rahner claims that the experience of the Spirit is the experience of the radical nature of human transcendence, which is constantly going beyond itself towards God, which is impelled by His self-communication. Thus the exterior and interior are never split apart and his theology remains intact from the criticisms of subjective isolationism.

Rahner's emphasis on the ceaseless going beyond the encounters and questioning of everyday life towards an unlimited horizon is at times reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa's claim that the spiritual journey is one of endless movement and discovery. But for Rahner, such a movement towards the silent mystery of God's love is only made possible through an appreciation of the mystery at the heart of everyday living, a journey made actual through the grace-given desire of the spirit to move ceaselessly towards that which is always near and always beyond, always a question and always an answer. He writes in one of his prayers that 'It is both terrible and comforting to dwell in the inconceivable nearness of God, and so to be loved by God Himself that the first and the last gift is infinity and inconceivability itself. But we have no choice. God is with us' (1989: 3). His own restless longing and desire to reach beyond the confines of this life are summed up in his prayer, *God of my Life*:

> Without You, I should founder helplessly in my own dull and groping narrowness. I could never feel the pain of longing, nor even deliberately resign myself to being content with this world, had not my mind again and again soared out over its own limitations into the hushed reaches which are filled by You alone, the Silent Infinite. (1989: 11)

This questioning also relates to those who do not seem to think very often of God, who appear to get along perfectly well without Him: 'Are You anything more for them than the One who sees to it that the world stays on its hinges, so that they won't have to call on You? Tell me, are You the God of *their* life?' (1989: 10).[3]

This chapter has highlighted the movement towards silent mystery which must remain at the heart of worship. For Maximus this is expressed most completely through his theology of Incarnation which, as I have indicated, echoes the cataphatic/apophatic dynamic of language and worship. For Rahner, it is humanity's encounter with the depths of human existence itself and humanity's self-questioning which must become the focus for an ascent towards the divine, an 'event' which liturgy has the challenge of making explicit through its ritual forms. In both theologies the silent mystery is 'another place' which liturgy both configures and towards which it points. My next chapter suggests that aesthetics has much to offer in this movement.

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3   Rahner's discussion of the 'sacred heart' focusses on a recognition of the interior presence of grace; a movement of return, as clear as Denys's, is required. He recommends that because we already possess a unity bestowed upon us from the start (1971: 233), we can with confidence move out from the complexity and multiplicity of the world into unity without fear: 'The unity by which we can really live is not the abstract or creaturely unity of the idea, or the unifying basis of our own nature, but rather the 'superessential' unity which by grace becomes more interior to us than the unity of our own being, and which, nevertheless, is not our own' (1971: 233). The return is essential: 'Only if you have learnt this through practice, if you can be alone, if you have learnt to be silent, to renounce, to let go, to be poor, only then can you also find the unity underlying the multiplicity' (1971: 234).

Chapter 6

The Movement of Aesthetics

In this final chapter I want to emphasize further that liturgy has a function analogous to aesthetics primarily in its attempt to express what ultimately is inexpressible, while at the same time, acknowledging the importance of that which is expressed. The liturgist must become the artist. For each, the material is always the means of this expression, the mode recognized as being both absolutely required and at the same time, inherently provisional. Art has the capacity to 'show' the mysterious and hidden depths of human existence by employing those material means available to it, and yet, like the apophatic–cataphatic dynamic in theological discourse, it can only ever offer provisional showings of the real within contexts of absence and presence. In some measure, therefore, the aesthetic is able to exhibit an excess of meaning, while paradoxically remaining frustrated to reveal fully what it attempts to communicate. This capacity entails a largely affective means of communication, transporting those involved to a world within and beyond the aesthetic, a boundary location, just as liturgical rites become the boundary spaces between the two worlds of the material and immaterial. Abbot Suger reminds us that in the *delight felt* through the material we come to sense a borderland world between the visible and the invisible (Thiessen 2004: 116) and by this experience we begin to transfer our attention from the material to that which is immaterial.

What We Are and What We Ought To Be

But let us begin by examining what Plato and Aristotle had to say about art in order to clarify more clearly the connections between aesthetics, liturgy and negative theology. For Plato, artists were to be banished from his ideal Republic because of their potential power; they were dangerous owing to their impact on how people might be changed to live their everyday lives through mimesis. For example, if allowed to flourish they could cause people to rest assured in their creative imitations of life and nature and would lure, by their copies of nature, a movement away from the 'real'. Three levels of mimesis are warned against here. As Jantzen argues,

> What occurs, in fact, is a third level of mimesis. Not only does nature copy the Forms, and art copy nature, but we who receive the art in turn copy it. We see a dramatic representation of a hero, for example, and take it as a model which we try to imitate in our lives. (2004: 202)

This is not, however, the whole story since Plato believed that the compelling power of beauty manifest in good art was able to lift the mind and heart to the Forms beyond the copies: 'In both the *Republic* and the *Symposium* the attractive power

of beauty is the great educative force that draws the soul upwards. Mimesis, the imitation of beauty, is never content with the imperfection of copies but moves up through them rung by rung' (Jantzen 2004: 204). A movement of ascent occurs as an experience of beauty begins to move us away from the mundane and the imperfect. Copies lead to the original.

'The Loveliness of the many-coloured stones' – Delight in the Material

We might take the architectural features of the Abbey of St Denis in Paris as a good example of such an ascent through the material (Panofsky 1979). Abbot Suger found in Denys's negative theology not only a weapon against St Bernard (who surprisingly resisted the importance of the symbolic mentality due to his wariness about material images) but also a reliable justification and grounds on which to base his own attitude towards art and life. The aesthetic sense was crucial for Abbot Suger in promoting and defending his vision of what religious architecture should aim to do within liturgy. It is highly likely that he was strongly influenced by the theology of Denys. A copy of *The Celestial Hierarchy* (as well as a translation of all of Denys's works) was bequeathed to the library at Christ Church Cathedral in Canterbury, and in his *Life of Becket* written in the 1180s, Abbot Suger demonstrates a strong debt to Denys.

Abbot Suger writes in a distinctively Platonic and Dionysian manner about the construction of the Cathedral, although there is some debate as to whether it might actually be called a Dionysian building (Binski 2004: 20):

> Therefore the process, by which the emanations of the Light Divine flow down until they are nearly drowned in matter and broken up into what looks like a meaningless welter of coarse material bodies, can always be reversed into a rise from pollution and multiplicity to purity and oneness. (Quoted in Panofsky 1979: 19)

In his commentary on Denys's *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Suger argues that the mind begins to rise from manual guidance (*materiali manuductione*) to that which is immaterial. He writes,

> This stone or that piece of wood is a light to me … For I begin to think whence the stone is invested with such properties … I am led through all things to that cause of all things which endows them with … goodness and beauty and essence, and with all other grants and gifts. (Quoted in Panofsky 1979: 20)

Suger promoted and endorsed this analogical movement in his capacity as patron of the arts and arranger of liturgical receptacles. His description of the precious stones on the high altar and its ornaments – the cross of St Eloy and the '*Escrin de Charlemagne*' – is strongly reminiscent of Denys's negative theology:

> Thus, when – out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God – the loveliness of the many-coloured stones has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime

of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an analogical manner. (Quoted in Thiessen 2004: 116).

In celebrating the consecration of the new *chevet* he writes '*Et quod perfundit lux nova, claret opus* (And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded by the new light)' (quoted in Panofsky 1979: 22). Such light recalls the light of the New Testament as opposed to the darkness of the Jewish Law; the brightness of the art will illuminate the minds of beholders which are incapable of attaining truth without the aid of such material form; the soul will be guided to the true Light which is Christ (Panofsky 1979: 24).

For those who criticized Suger for his excessive spending on the rebuilding and ornamentation of St Denis, his reply was that homage becomes possible through the sacred vessels: '(But) we profess that we must do homage also through the outward ornaments of sacred vessels, and to nothing in the world in an equal degree as to the service of the Holy Sacrifice, with all inner purity and with all outward splendour' (quoted in Thiessen 2004: 117). In Abbot Suger's account of the renovation of the cathedral, light again was to play an important part in its design:

> and, likewise, that the dimensions of the old side-aisles should be equalised with the dimensions of the new side-aisles, except for that elegant and praiseworthy extension, (the form of) a circular string of chapels , by virtue of which the whole (church) would shine with the wonderful and uninterrupted light of most luminous windows, pervading the interior beauty. (Quoted in Panofksy 1979:101)

The decoration of the Church was to be an act of creative adoration and the main altar of the blessed Denis, where men had consecrated themselves to the monastic life, was

> encased, putting up golden panels on either side and adding a fourth, even more precious one … But the rear panel, of marvellous workmanship and lavish sumptuousness … we ennobled with chased relief work equally admired for its form as for its material, so that certain people might be able to say: *The workmanship surpassed the material*. (Quoted in Thiessen 2004: 115–16)

Light and space became in Abbot Suger's plans highly symbolic and echoed the purpose of liturgical music – to lift up the soul to the Light. Those who entered the cathedral were to look upwards towards heaven just as the singing of the psalms in the divine office raised their voices towards the light (Duby 2000: 54). Theologians of the time made a close study of the law of optics and believed that a ray of light linked a person to God, the Ultimate Light. Cathedral canons insisted that the restoration of St Denis's cathedral should strip away the walls so that the light might flood through more easily. Then, transformed by the light, stained glass would portray the lives of the saints as an aid to contemplation and movement, an important issue I examined in Chapter 3. As Duby notes, 'the real lesson which the windows were intended to teach was that of a passage, of the transmutation of the carnal into the spiritual' (2000: 55). People would be transported to the heavenly city and in this circular, processional movement, emanating from and returning to God,

the windows performed a vital function. Outside too, images were carved, which made a scenic backdrop to the theatrical para-liturgies taking place by which people were absorbed in the performance of their faith. Underhill endorses this point in her analysis of liturgy and art:

> Liturgical worship shares with all ritual action the character of a work of art. Entering upon it, we leave the lower realism of daily life for the higher realism of a successive action which expresses and interprets eternal truth by the deliberate use of poetic and symbolic material. (1936: 111)

The movement is both personal and ecclesial, for as the individual ascends to see the world and the self according to the divine plan, so too does the Church as a body grow in its understanding of those things. Underhill comments, 'By the successive presentation of all the phases of the soul's response to the Holy, its alternative use of history and oratory, drama and rhythm, its appeal to feeling, thought and will, the individual is educated and gathered into the great movement of the Church' (1936: 111). She concludes, 'liturgy, being in its nature a corporate and stylised acknowledgment of the most august realities of our experience, must be informed by disciplined thought – again in this exhibiting its likeness to great art' (1936: 111).

Augustine was particularly influenced by Plato's understanding of art in his consideration of music. Music was one of four pathways within mathematics which also included arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. In fact, one branch of music, *musica mundana*, was believed to overlap with astronomy since the heavenly spheres were thought to bring about, through their movement and ratio, a musical sound inaudible to the earthly realm (Pickstock 1999: 243). All of these disciplines encouraged a movement away from the material to the incorporeal; the effect of music being to lead people beyond the sensible realm in order to delight in the timeless harmony of eternity (Begbie 1997: 689).

Aristotle's view of art was different to Plato's. Not for him the shadows of the cave as they beckoned us to an ideal, but rather an emphasis on the here and now, the discernment of truth within the material itself. But, like Plato, he was concerned with the power of beauty, primarily to bring about moral change. Art, he believed, had a mimetic or imitation effect on observers, as they came to identify themselves with a character or event and, therefore, learnt something about their own lives. Tragedy, therefore, can be beautiful because it tells us much about ourselves as we come to pity and fear the hero or heroine who suffers. As Jantzen comments, learning for Aristotle

> proceeds most naturally by imitation, appropriating to ourselves and our own action the 'meaning of things' that we gain from the work of art. It engages and integrates our reason and emotions, so that our response purifies and expands our moral insight and we learn to become better. (2004: 232)

Aristotle believed that music was the most mimetic of the arts due to its capacity to conjure up striking 'images' or *expressions* of fear, joy, hope and anger in some of the most telling ways. For this Greek philosopher, image and expression were not separated to the same degree they are now – imaginative imitation always entailed

expressive communication. It is, therefore, inadequate to use the word 'imitation' alone to convey Aristotle's real sense of the dynamic of art (Kaufmann 1992: 37). Mimesis is more a task of creating a make-believe world, an ethos, through the employment of a *mythos* (Milbank 1997: 127), which includes communicating a world or ethos or expressive atmosphere, a theme I shall expand upon in my later discussion of the work of Dufrenne. *Mythos* and mimesis are really two aspects of the same thing. The *mythos* of the hero in the poem or play makes known to us what, for example, heroism is through this creative expression:

> There is in consequence an observed disparity between the poetic heightening of heroic characteristics and their less perfect manifestation in actuality, and this is because heroism is an inherently teleological phenomenon, in which we set before ourselves what we *are* and what we *might be*. (Milbank 1997: 127)

This is linked to a narrative function which works teleologically, since we are transported into the space which moves us to think who we are and what we might be. Liturgy carries a similar dramatic function through its creation of its *mythos*, another world of mimetic expression which moves and inspires us.

Mikel Dufrenne

The French phenomenologist, Mikel Dufrenne's work (1973) on aesthetic experience is insightful in clarifying the expressive and affective dimensions of liturgy. He points to the capacity of art to engender a range of feelings which befit the object. The artist's task is not to represent the physical object in a figurative manner but to convey an emotional 'essence', which communicates a human significance. Numerous artists seek to represent human passions by means of their chosen aesthetic object. For example,

> Van Gogh's bedroom is not merely a room where someone lives. It is a room which is haunted by Van Gogh's spirit and which … urges us to sense the mystery of the night which the painter could not enter without being overwhelmed. The aesthetic object carries the world which reveals itself. (Dufrenne 1973: 227; see also Ford 1990; 2003).

To take a related example, it is important to appreciate how the artistic representation of the sea might have a distinctive human import, reflecting and affecting a person's concerns, hopes and fears. In an evocative seascape we come to feel the sea's power or calm, we sense its presence which might also include other objects in its expressive field. An aura surrounds the object, encompassing other aspects of the world in its embrace. An artwork is capable, therefore, of expressing 'a world' of 'atmosphere' rooted in its capacity to evoke an emotional response (Wynn 2005: 153). Dufrenne writes how 'the aesthetic object manifests a certain quality which words cannot translate but which communicates itself in arousing a feeling ... This quality proper to the work … is a world atmosphere' (Dufrenne 1973: 178). The various aspects of the aesthetic creation must combine in a unified whole. He takes the example of the novel. Here characters and events are established within a setting in order to produce 'a total effect' (1973: 178); it is highly likely that the work will

only be successful if it is able to do this manifesting 'a unity which transcends the detail of the representations' (1973: 178).

Expression establishes a singular world. And this comes about through 'an internal cohesion which is amenable only to the logic of feeling' (Dufrenne 1973: 180). It manifests itself in what it integrates as well as in what it excludes. For Dufrenne the expressed world has the power to pervade the world outside the aesthetic object. He comments on the power of art which is analogous to the role of the negative theologian's appeal to the expressive,

> Like the Einsteinian world, it is both finite and unlimited. It has an atmosphere that diffuses itself … because it has the positive power of extending itself beyond the particular objects of which it is the quality and of drawing other objects to it in order to disclose itself through them. This atmosphere is like the spilled wine of which the French poet Paul Valery speaks in *Le vin perdu* 'which requires an entire sea in order to manifest its inexhaustible power of coloration'. (Dufrenne 1973: 181)

Likewise, the scenery of a play participates and adds to its expressive function, enhancing the affective quality of the created world, thus more than simply its geography. As Dufrenne comments,

> Things are no longer a mere focus of action, they truly have a meaning by themselves – a meaning which is not their utilitarian meaning. They are aestheticized. The scenery ceases to decorate because it has undertaken the responsibility of expressing the world rather than leaving it to the care of the text. (1973: 179)

He points to Craig's work on the expressive power of scenery: 'it is idle to talk about the distraction of scenery, because the question here is not how to create some distracting scenery, but how to create a place which harmonizes with the thoughts of the poets …' (quoted in Dufrenne 1973: 179). It is the same with architecture – 'the architectural monument introduces us into a world of its own ... Not to know the interior life of the architectural monument is to refuse its aesthetic quality'. At Versailles, 'man gains stature and solidity by the majesty which surrounds him, rebuking all dissonant emotion like a perfect harmony' (1973: 179–80). This has an impact on the surrounding area as it too comes to have the 'feel' of the aesthetic object. As Dufrenne comments, 'And the surroundings – the park, the sky, and even the town – which the palace annexes and aestheticises speak the same language' (1973: 180). There is a quality of feeling which outstrips the affective essence of the everyday world.

'To Express is to Transcend towards a Meaning'

Dufrenne argues that it is through a carefully expressed atmosphere into which objects are placed that we become able to apprehend that object. It is essential that a certain 'world-quality' is established by which the object is able to take on meaning. The expressed transfigures the represented – and confers on it a meaning which is inexhaustible – an inexhaustibility which is different from that which it enjoys within reality. Heidegger comments that 'Being is unable to manifest itself in any fashion if it is unable to find some way of entering into a world' (quoted in Dufrenne 1973:

188). It is through the transcendence of *dasein* that this *Urgeschichte* is realized. To express is to transcend towards a meaning and the luminescence of the meaning – the quality of the atmosphere – which gives rise to a new countenance of the object. 'What strange fragrance the fleurs-de-lis of medieval Annunciation take on in illuminating an immediately present world of purity and faith!' (1973:188) writes Dufrenne.

The world of the aesthetic object is indefinite 'in the sense of a potentiality which no actualisation can exhaust' (Dufrenne 1973: 182) and such a world 'is not crowded with objects; it precedes them. It is like a faint light in which they are revealed and in which everything that is perceptible in this light is disclosed …' (1973: 182). Expression naturally solicits representation. For example, Malraux, writing of Faulkner's *Sanctuary* comments,

> I would be not at all surprised if … the work were for him, not a story of which the unfolding determines tragic situations, but, on the contrary, a story born of tragedy, of the opposition and the crushing of unknown persons, and if the imagination serves only to lead logically from the characters to this original situation. (Quoted in Dufrenne 1973: 187)

Dufrenne continues, 'Furthermore, expression consecrates that which is objective in what is represented, that in it which imitates the real', and 'When Rimbaud writes, "O seasons, O castles!" in order to express the world of the helpless and miserable soul in a universe too full and beautiful … then seasons and castles are there in all their glory' (1973: 189). The expressed world is like the soul of the represented world, which is, as it were, its body.

> It is due to their conjugal status that we are able to define the world of a work … This world is the work itself, considered not in its immediate and meaningless reality as a mute thing without a soul but as a thing which surpasses itself toward its meaning … (1973: 190)

He adds, 'In short, the world of the work is a finite but unlimited totality, a totality which the work shows through both its form and content, while soliciting reflection as well as feeling' (1973: 190).

The aesthetic world summons us to participate in its spectacle, moving us out of our comfortable world (Dufrenne 1973: 513). Its method is mimetic but only in the sense that it must 'reveal the real in its intimacy instead of reproducing it in its official and formal aspect' (1973: 514). To succeed in this we must 'participate in this exploration … become party to the movements' and be 'summoned to the table along the *Pilgrims at Emmaus*'. Represented space is no longer geometric space but 'the lived space where the distance interests and moves the whole body' (1973: 514). 'The function of the representation is … not to imitate the real as to serve the expression which allows the real to be grasped' (1973: 526). 'A crucifix is not true because it demonstrates anatomy' (1973: 527); 'we need to allow the feeling that the aesthetic object awakens to be deposited in us – a feeling which in turn illuminates the world where such an object can appear' (1973: 527).

As a consequence, we may come to deal with the world in a more integrated way than we did before seeing the aesthetic object. As Wynn comments, 'For instance, an affectively toned recognition of the "soft delicate tranquillity" of a Vermeer interior might lead us to experience an indeterminate range of other objects in terms of "tranquillity"' (2005: 153). Artwork therefore may provide an interpretative means of relating to the world, of 'seeing' the world in a different manner, of responding to it with a changed affective approach. New meaning and interpretation might follow as our affectively toned experience of the world takes on a new form, one influenced by our encounter with the artwork. The world is seen in a different manner.

The work may thus lead us to a sense of revelation through the affective: 'The affective quality thus expressed is the quality of the world … what is expressed is something more necessary – a revelation' (Dufrenne 1973: 518). 'The aesthetic object is a point of departure not so much for objective knowledge as for a reading of the expressiveness of the real' (1973: 516). It matters little that one does not understand Latin when one listens to a *Missa solemnis*. When I listen to the affective quality expressed in music I feel something in-depth – not a skin-deep sentiment: 'What is expressed is something more profound and more necessary – a revelation' (1973: 518–9). 'And, although nothing is revealed to me except a light, I know that the real can appear through it. Nothing is given to me except a key but I know it can open doors. I know that the real can be seen in this way and even that it calls for such seeing' (1973: 519). Dufrenne's understanding of revelation is instructive here. His notion of seeing the real by means of the aesthetic through moments of expressive disclosure which allow glimpses of the real, reflect much of what negative theologians attempt within metaphysical frameworks. Dufrenne clarifies his claim further when he adds,

> The real is always present not as a reservoir of identifiable objects or determined events which it is necessary to evoke and name, but as a being. I can verify the joy in Bach's work when I see the innocent games of a child or the sparkling grace of a dancer – such experiences verify what I already know is the real in Bach's world – that there is joy that 'it is so'. (1973: 519)

Pure music expresses this 'real' and comes before the world in advance of things as the aesthetic object manifests time in a specific way. 'The rhythm of Macbeth is precipitate, whereas the action is spread out over years – twenty years, according to the chronicles on which the play is based. The rhythm of Joyce's Ulysses is extremely slow, whereas the action unfolds in twenty-four hours' (Dufrenne 1973: 184). 'Represented time is a time without temporalization, an arrested time such as we find in a painting representing dawn or twilight …' (1973: 185). A new kind of perception of the world comes about by an affectively toned awareness. Wynn notes that

> artwork does not elicit a set of feelings just by virtue of its brute impact on the senses; rather, the feelings it draws out are those required for a proper perception of the character of the work. And the mode of perception that is called forth by the work can then be transferred, at least in principle, to our experience more generally, so that we come to inhabit a correlative 'world'. (2005: 157)

There is, therefore, an inter-relationship between perception, conception and feeling. Wynn points out that in applying Dufrenne's model to religious understanding some interesting features emerge. Understanding the world religiously does not entail gathering more information or data about that world, but rather 'seeing' some pattern or depth to the data already given. If we are to see in such a manner, it is necessary to adopt an affectively toned mode of perception and appreciation of that data. We come to 'recognize' the pattern which is there.

In his chapter on 'The Being of the Aesthetic Object', Dufrenne shows how the aesthetic object has the initiative (1973: 231), it commands me and demands that I submit to its requests. It is therefore a form of 'alienation' since 'I must surrender to the enchantment, deny my tendency to seek mastery of the object, and conjure up the sensuous so as to lose myself in it' (1973: 231). The experience which follows does not entail the object being absorbed into me without retaining its own objectivity: 'The distance which it has is not abolished because I am absorbed in it, since it remains a rule for me and imposes its meaning on me. Such is the paradox: I become the melody or the statue, and yet the melody and the statue remain external to me' (1973: 232). 'It is in me that the aesthetic object is constituted as other than me ... Instead of positing the object, consciousness embraces the object, which affirms itself in this embrace' (1973: 232).

Dufrenne emphasizes the role of feeling in perception. Feeling is a

> mode of being of the subject which corresponds to a mode of being in the object. Feeling is that in me which relates to a certain quality of the object through which the object manifests its intimacy ... Feeling reveals being not only as reality but also as depth. (1973: 276)

A new attitude on the part of the subject is required whereby I must 'match its depth with my own' (1973: 377). It is akin to 'listening in on a message', whereby I myself am put into question:

> Whether or not I am capable of having the feeling will constitute a self-testing and will also provide the measure of my authenticity. Is it not on account of my feelings, their quality, and their penetration that I am truly judged? All of which proves that to feel is in a sense to transcend. (1973: 377)

Feeling in which perception is realized is a form of knowledge (*connaissance*). Crucially, Dufrenne stresses that, for example, the emotion of fear is not to be confused with 'the feeling of the horrible. It is rather, a certain way of reacting in the face of the horrible when the horrible is taken as a characteristic of the world as it appears at the time' (1973: 378). His further comments crystallize his position on the relationship between feeling and knowledge: 'this knowledge involves a certain commitment with respect to the world, through which it is neither thought or acted upon but simply felt' (1973: 378). Hence this is why medieval religious leaders became so concerned about the 'right' image, for if the 'wrong' feeling were to be produced then our conception and perception of Christ would be proportionately skewed and distorted.

Liturgy and Expression

My examination of Dufrenne's work on aesthetic experience resonates with liturgy's task. The expressive power of worship engenders a mode of feeling which results in the participant's propensity to perceive the world in a similar manner. The performance of what matters and what is significant in life spills over into an affective and perceptual re-working of the 'external' world outside the liturgical context but significantly related to it. Such a view entails a liturgically-based reconfiguring of our usual emotional response produced by the world outside the liturgy; if this is successful then a perception of the world akin to that created by the liturgy is likely to take place. If this coalescence cannot be realized then I might be unable to participate in the religious tradition itself since my personal perception of the world is far too removed from that engendered in the artwork or liturgy.

What is crucial liturgically, therefore, is to engender a liturgical world which expresses and has a feeling for the values the liturgy performs. Such an 'expression' may then have an impact on those who move out of that expressive circle into the mundane world. Liturgical representation has a daunting task in this regard: to try and 'co-ordinate' the feelings communicated by the liturgy so that they impact on the world outside. This is not an exercise in relevance but an endeavour of aesthetic and political significance; of moving forward from an emotional engagement with the world of liturgy to a position of transformational seeing and changing the world. And Dufrenne reminds us that this is possible by the expressive potentiality of the material.

Cottingham's work (2005, to which I have already referred), is helpful here since he focusses on the emotional framework for perceiving the world. If the world is 'charged with the grandeur of God', as Hopkins suggests, then we need to experience it emotionally in these terms: 'if the religious world view is correct, there is a correct way of seeing the world …' (Cottingham 2005: 87). Aesthetic experience can assist in this religious formation since its mode of communication appeals to the heart rather than the head, thereby determining another kind of reception through its creation of a particular form of *mythos*.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The twentieth-century German phenomenologist, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his classic text *Truth and Method* has argued that experiencing works of art is similar to playing a game; examples from liturgy are used to support his claims. Through art, we become overtaken by and absorbed in another world, just as we do when playing a game:

> The attraction of the game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game tends to master the players … The real subject of the game (this is shown in precisely those experiences in which there is only a single player) is not the player, but instead the game itself. The game is what holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there. (Gadamer 1975: 95–6)

Gadamer differs here from Schiller and post-Kantian understandings of aesthetics as a mode of transportation to another world whereby personal concerns are left behind, since he holds the view that it involves submitting to the norms and requirements of the work of art as in a game. It has a normative authority over recipients which, through its aesthetic address, challenges the viewer or reader to re-think their existence. For Gadamer, a work of art invites the participant to see the world in a new and different manner.

Games and aesthetic experience both require participation. Games have authority over players by their imposition of rules and yet demand creative participation in their worlds. But if games and works of art take on a concrete existence by being played or watched or read, for example, then the experience is capable of being changed over time, as participants respond from the perspectives of their own worldviews. Meaning does not simply stem from the author or originator of the game but by the participatory reception of the experience. What is of most significance about Gadamer's claims about art is its representation of claims to truth addressed to the audience. This experience is far more than authorial intention and Gadamer uses Aristotle's notion of mimesis to persuade us of art's potential impact.

Art is able to deliver a 'transformation into the true' (Gadamer 1975: 101). Using the language of hiddenness and disclosure, Gadamer speaks of a redemption 'into true being' (1975: 101). The world of the work of art is 'a wholly transformed world. By means of it everyone recognises that that is how things are' (1975: 102). 'Reality' for Gadamer is defined as what is untransformed 'and art as the raising up of this reality into its truth' (1975: 102). By truth he means that aspect of reality which has been separated out from others and given special focus; in other words, a spotlight has been shone on a particular aspect which allows it to become universal. Heidegger's account of *aletheia* or disclosure is similar to Gadamer's notion of the manifestation of truth. Artistic truth drags from the contingency of the world the fullness of its being and represents it creatively. As Warnke comments, 'When one views a work of art one has the whole of what it represents in front of one; hence, in principle, the whole truth of what it represents is available to one as well' (1987: 58).

Mimesis or imitation always has the task of conveying knowledge, of coming to *recognize* something more than is already known. Referring to Plato's theory of *anamnesis*, Gadamer demonstrates how the 'known' enters 'into its true being and manifests itself as what it is only when it is recognised' (1975: 103). Representation then becomes a process involving recognition and what is represented comes to exist more fully. Such recognition enables us to know this truth again in a new manner, not simply as a repetition of our previous knowings. The joy of recognition for Gadamer is that more is known than only the known. He gives examples from tragic drama by substituting Aristotle's 'pity' and 'fear' for 'to moan in distress' and 'to shudder in fright'. The power and influence of tragic drama over the audience is more overwhelming than Aristotle's words originally conveyed. We recognize that we too can be sucked into the tragedy like the heroes and become a victim to circumstances. The catharsis which results comes about because we are able to accept that the reality of the play is a reality for us and a vehicle towards our own self-knowledge. This is a form of recognition, a new remembering and of seeing again what is true in relation to one's own life.

In fact, this is an event of 'revelation' for Gadamer, whereby imitation and representation are no longer simply a copy or second version but what he calls a 'bringing forth' in which the spectator becomes engrossed. As I have noted, although Plato understood very well the gap between the original and the imitation or copy, he also knew that all knowledge was essentially recognition which, in the words of Gadamer, has 'the character of genuine knowledge of essence' (1975: 103). Overcoming Kant's notion that aesthetics has nothing to do with knowledge, Gadamer points to the central importance of representation, of the 'playing of the play' or the performance of the rite through which truth is disclosed: 'The playing of the play is what speaks to the spectator, through its representation, and this in such a way that the spectator, despite the distance between it and himself, still belongs to it' (1975: 104). The 'bringing forth' and expression of truth depends upon the actualized mode of performance.

Gadamer suggests that a work of art is able to focus our attention because it condenses and intensifies the manner in which we make sense of the world more generally. We are able to become part of its meaning and the meaning of everyday existence as we respond to its density and originality (1975: 99–150). Works of art contain an element of mimesis due to their intensified imitation. A thing is represented in such a way that it is actually present in an intensified abundance and opens itself to a range of meanings. Gadamer writes, 'All true imitation is a transformed reality because it brings before us intensified possibilities never seen before. Every imitation is an exploration, an intensification of extremes' (quoted in Flanagan 1990: 299).

Along with this focussed disclosure sits an indeterminancy of meaning which gives rise to interpretation. Gadamer wants to defend the notion of mimesis while accepting that art is as susceptible to interpretation as any history. Representation is not a simple reading in of some meaning but a revealing of what the thing itself already points to: 'Every gesture is also opaque in an enigmatic fashion. It is a mystery that holds back as much as it reveals. For what the gesture reveals is the being of meaning rather than the knowledge of meaning' (quoted in Flanagan 1990: 299). The 'being of meaning' is tacit and evokes a memory of something obscured but known before and which is revealed again with fresh knowledge. Artistic representations teach us something we did not know before. We see with a new revelatory insight, as both revelation and recognition come into play. The disclosure of being that shines forth in a work of art is best translated as 'radiance', which draws the soul towards it in desire, with the disclosure becoming part of the communication of truth. The disclosure of being is the happening of truth.

Gadamer's concerns echo much of my argument so far in their focus on the recognition and at the same time revelatory nature of truth 'brought forth' through expressive liturgical performance. This 'bringing forth' through the intensified expressions and performances of the material echoes the dynamic liturgy employs in its task of awakening disclosures of that which lies hidden within the rite, disclosures which entail truths about the self, the values to which we yearn and the world to which we belong. The rite brings about this disclosure and beckons worshippers to imitate in their own lives the values enacted. Although this occurs at the level of the vertical within religious rite, religious performance like any aesthetic mode,

invites observers to become participants and to *feel* at home in the world enacted, a boundary space made real within and through the rite itself.

For Gadamer, the task of hermeneutics is to uncover what is tacit in human life without entailing an absolute or definitive revelation of the way things are. Its ability to reveal rests on its subtlety to both disclose and conceal. Revelation always operates in a dialectical relationship with the hidden. Therefore, the procedure of hermeneutics always rests on this to-ing and fro-ing of disclosure and concealment, often communicated through the symbolic. In 'The Relevance of the Beautiful' he focusses on how symbols allow us to have an inkling of that life which we have always sought, an experience which is likely to make whole our fragmentary lives. The 'meaning' which becomes present in a symbol is brought about in the only way possible that such a meaning could be communicated. It could not have come about by any other means.

Gadamer writes with regard to history that,

> In truth, the experience of history returns the hermeneutic task to its own place. It has to decipher the meaning of fragments of history anew, fragments that are limited by, and shipwreck on, the dark contingency of the factual and, above all, on the twilight into which for each present consciousness the future disappears. (Quoted in Warnke 1987: 123)

On the subject of festivals Gadamer writes, 'The festival is only there in so far as it is celebrated. But this in no way says that it is of a subjective character and has its being only in the subjectivity of those celebrating. Rather one celebrates the festival because it is there' (quoted in Warnke 1987: 51). Festivals move us out of inauthentic time into authentic time. It is in the nature of art and festival that they should actually offer up time, grasping and suspending it beyond its normal realm. That is what festival celebration means. The calculating way in which we normally manage time is brought to a standstill. In the 'material' experience of the festival and work of art, which allows such tarrying, a sense of eternity becomes possible. Gadamer suggests that the essence of our temporal experience of art is learning how to tarry in this way and that it might be the only way that is granted to us as finite beings to relate to what we often call eternity.

David Tracy

David Tracy, who owes much to Gadamer's thinking, also argues that art has the potential to reveal truth, with reference to what he calls 'classics' (2000). His thesis is that 'what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons "classics" is that here we recognise nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth' (2000: 108). With art we do not find ourselves autonomous subjects expressing a taste for someone else's taste but 'We find ourselves "caught up" in its world, we are shocked, surprised, challenged by its startling beauty *and* its recognisable truth, its instinct for the essential' (2000: 110); 'we recognise the truth of the work's disclosure of a world of reality transforming, if

only for a moment, ourselves: our lives, our sense of possibilities and actuality, our destiny' (2000: 110).

This task is particularly difficult now. In an earlier and more homogenous culture some were trained and educated to experience the 'tested communal sense of the disclosive and transformative power and truth of the work of art', but he adds, 'Who today considers feeling an expression of nature itself, much less an expression of the whole of that overflowing reality first envisaged by Plotinus and articulated anew by Coleridge and Schelling? … Art, too, is finally, private' (2000: 111).

To understand the hermeneutical endeavour in theology calls for a consideration of the classics:

> To grasp the full significance of hermeneutical understanding for systematic theology, … demands further attention to the normative reality which drives all humanistic, including theological enterprises forward: the existence of classics confronting, surprising, shocking and transforming us all. (Tracy 2000: 107)

For Tracy, the symbol in aesthetic theory plays a vital role and covers a wide spectrum from the Neoplatonic tradition beginning with Plotinus through to the Romantic and German Idealist traditions: 'What art symbolises ranges from the cosmic harmony of Plotinus, to its hierarchical place in Hegel, Schelling and Schopenhauer through to Langer's symbol of feeling …' (2000: 140).

Tracy asks us to note Gadamer's idea that an encounter with a work of art is an experience of 'an event of truth' (2000: 111). Subjectivity is never in control but the art work 'encounters me with surprise, impact and even shock of reality itself … In experiencing art, I recognise a truth I somehow know but know I did not really know except through the experience of recognition of the essential compelled by the work of art' (2000: 111–12). This recognition, reminiscent of Dufrenne's claims, has a significant impact on the world we then inhabit: 'I am transformed by its truth when I return to the everyday, to the whole of what I ordinarily call reality, and discover new affinities, new sensibilities for the everyday' (2000: 112).

In transcending my everyday self-consciousness and my usual desires for control: 'I find I must employ words like "recognise" to describe that impact is not my own achievement. It happens, it occurs, I am "caught up in" the disclosure of the work … recognition of what is important, essential, real …' (Tracy 2000: 112). I find myself in another realm of the public and 'Later, perhaps, in the "tranquillity" of that "recollection" which characterises much reflection, I may consider how that disclosure relates to my vision of the world' (2000: 112). Taking up Gadamer's analogy of the game, Tracy suggests that in experiencing a genuine work of art we encounter the truth about the actuality and potentiality about ourselves. I must lose my self-consciousness, otherwise 'any ability to transcend myself' is no longer possible. By fully playing the game I gain a new self: 'The game becomes not an object over against a self-conscious subject but an experienced relational and releasing mode of being in the world distinct from the ordinary, nonplayful one' (2000: 114). The experience is of a transformative truth, at once revealing and concealing (2000: 114). The experience is an 'ecstatic one, since each person must take a risk for there must occur a distanciation of the self from itself in order to render … public meaning' (2000: 126).

The Expressive in Art and Liturgy

In the light of my discussions of Gadamer and Tracy above, it is helpful to consider in more detail the importance of the expressive power of liturgy and its relation to its aesthetic mode. I attempt this through an insightful discussion of Sherry's description of the revelatory power of 'images of redemption'. In his account of the dynamic relationship between theology and the arts, he makes a useful distinction between 'expressions' and 'illustrations' (2003). Illustrations are those examples which require a great deal of background information and depend on something else to make them really work. They represent and illustrate pre-determined, existing ideas and concepts. In contrast, 'primary expressions' portray a message immediately, in a fresh way, and are not based on pre-determined soteriological explanations. They offer something new and original each time they are encountered. As Girard writes in his assessment of Dostoevsky's symbolism, 'The novelist does not attempt to "illustrate" the principles of the Christian faith, but he obeys the internal dynamics of his own creation' (quoted in Sherry 2003: 163). Sherry relates this to the notion of 'showing' (2003: 161). Like the Orthodox icon, works of art do not simply demonstrate but 'show' things and therefore play a role analogous to revelation – they unveil the hidden through their expressive creativity, confronting us with a new way of seeing and being. The word *revelation*, like the Greek word *apocalypses*, literally means 'uncovering' or stating a truth (2003: 184). Art has this capacity to disclose, to show glimpses of truth or reveal moments of beauty or goodness which would otherwise remain concealed. They rarely present arguments and depend on an engagement of feeling to stimulate religious understanding and perception. As Hederman suggests when referring to Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Artists*, art can be an illuminating vehicle for theology, not just an illustration or companion to it (2002: 59). Theology is created, not impersonated through the aesthetic.

Nietzsche's complaint that if Christians are redeemed they don't look it, suggests that their lack of any feeling of redemption reflects the world in which they live, which offers very little affective intuitions of redemption (Sherry 2003: 3). Faith, as a result, remains at the level of the cognitive and intellectual and therefore potentially superficial. The work of Nicholas Bulgakov and Martha Nussbaum is noteworthy here. They argue that emotions have a cognitive content, because they are related to our beliefs and judgments about the world, especially beliefs about what is important and valuable. Nussbaum's account of knowledge has important overlaps with religious awareness, seeing love as the basis for understanding (1990).

The more influential attempts at 'doing' theology in the past have employed discursive methods which have invariably centred on explanations of Christian revelation, to demonstrate its alliance with the tenets of reason. Such methods, while still beneficial, carry little emotional impact. They simply retell what has already been formulated or give evidence to support claims and conclusions. Rather than expressing with freshness that which bears and demands endless re-expression, they regurgitate previous claims or update findings with new evidence. I shall extend this notion of re-expression with reference to the work of Cixous later. In contrast, affective approaches to theology which centre on the arts and which have the capacity to appeal to the heart, feeling and the senses are more likely to bring about

a 'presence' of originality. Nichols comments that 'art has a virtually sacramental power to bring the intangible within our touching and that paintings can become "vehicles of presence"' (quoted in Sherry 2003: 158). Similarly, Steiner in *Real Presences* suggests

> The density of God's absence, the edge of presence in that absence, is no empty dialectical twist. The phenomenology is elementary: it is like the recession from us of one whom we have loved or sought to love or of one before whom we have dwelt in fear. The distancing is, then, charged with the pressures of a nearness out of reach, of a remembrance torn at the edges. (1991: 229–30)

All this is instructive for an understanding of the potential power of liturgy in its relation to the arts and to its aesthetic constituent. Liturgy's sense-based materiality – rhetoric, movement, gesture, architecture, iconography, music, painting – all have the potential to 'show' and reveal disclosures of truth in a creative and direct manner: 'The primary meaning of art and literature … is to show things and to express and communicate meanings directly by themselves' writes Sherry (2003: 6). Of course, such references to the ongoing redemptive power of art has its dangers, and for some writers like Begbie (1997) and Dixon (1964) – although highly supportive of the inclusion of the arts in the theological enterprise – caution is recommended lest 'Christ's work is no more than an aesthetic reordering of creation (when it is clearly much more than that)' (Begbie 1997: 111). But I think such warnings are a little too wary not to allow the complementarity of art to further Christ's redemptive work and I align myself much more with Sherry's more confident position which acknowledges that the arts can serve as 'channels of grace' (2003: 10).

Hélène Cixous

The French feminist writer Hélène Cixous offers important insights about the expressive mode of art by demonstrating the impact of visual, in her case painting, over the written word. Her claim is that painting is able to capture far more than words can ever do. She senses in the painter 'the terrific beating of the painter's heart. If I were a painter what pain! What passion! What incessant jealousy of the sky. Of the air, what tortuous adoration of the light!' (Cixous 2000: 585). But since she is not a painter but a writer she 'makes incessant detours and goes through texts' (2000: 585). Cixous notes that she would be able to die endlessly of wonder if she were a painter; through wonder acts of adoration become possible and the divine is revealed in the beauty of the world.

Because she is short-sighted, she is able to see, flat on her stomach, the ants' feet and insects become her heroes. It is through the incessant and repeated attempts at capturing different moments in time that adoration becomes possible. Monet's paintings of Rouen cathedral were able to capture time and light with repeated attempts: 'I sense the painter's superhuman task: to capture the hundred cathedrals that are being born in one day …' (2000: 586). What is required is the loss of the ego. At times the painter's ego is no more attached than a milk tooth and when this

occurs 'the painter becomes permeable, becomes immense and virgin, and becomes woman. He lets light work in him. Submission to the process' (2000: 588).

Cixous recounts how the moment of adoration begins once leaving behind the need to veil, lie or gild takes place. It is an act of pure fidelity. Rembrandt did this and that is why he is a painter of being, one who has painted 'the most intense presence, the people he had looked at are alone, have the absence of intimacy, do not feel themselves looked at; they are looking inside their hearts in the direction of the infinite' (2000: 589). She compares the act of creation of the writer with that of the painter. Both must be concerned with fidelity and this means equal respect for what 'seems' beautiful and what seems ugly. All creation is beautiful. It is only 'seems' since painting does not know the ugly: 'It isn't the beautiful that is true. It's the true that is ... The ugly looked at with respect and without hatred and without disgust is equal to the "beautiful". The nonbeautiful is also beautiful' (2000: 591). Everything is equal to God and the painter. Once we have courage to see this and have patience then we can hope to see God. But we need 'the courage to be afraid' (2000: 591).

The world has to be suffered if any act of adoration is to become possible; the courage to 'tremble and sweat and cry' (Cixous 2000: 592). And we must face the 'fear of allowing oneself to be carried away by exaltation, the fear of adoring' (2000: 592). The most difficult fidelity is to feeling – 'for the reality of the soul there are no tears. One can only allude to the divine' (2000: 595). After repeated attempts the painter has the right to repeat again until 'the water lilies become divine sparrows' (2000: 595). Perhaps in the end that would give the portrait of God.

Painters and poets are able to capture in a phrase reminiscent of van Gogh, 'sunflower life'. Cixous claims that when she is 110 all she would have done is to give a portrait of God, 'Of what escapes us and makes us wonder. Of what we do not know but feel' (2000: 596). It is an apophatic moment and a recognition of our own divinity; in recognizing our own divinity we become artists and poets: 'We who forget that we could also be as luminous, as light, as the swallow that crosses the summit of the incomparable hill Fuji, so intensely radiant that we could ourselves be the painter's models, the heroes of human presence and the painter's gaze' (2000: 596).

She ends her essay with the following image of the priest as artist:

> When you come, do not ask for Hokusai; they will not know how to answer you. Ask for the priest who draws and who recently moved into the building, ask the owner Gorobei for the beggar-priest in the courtyard of the Meio-in-temple, in the middle of the bush. (2000: 597)

All showings are provisional and contextualize absence as much as presence.

Alongside this expressive power to disclose and reveal, there always remains a measure of concealment in any liturgical expression which echoes, as I have claimed, the creative interplay between the apophatic and cataphatic in theological discourse. As indicated earlier, although the 'language' of religion and worship is essentially bodily, tangible, poetic, mythic and material, it is inextricably linked to its apophatic sibling, which leads participants as much to ineffable mystery and unknowing, as it does to 'knowing' and 'revealing'. The transcendent beauty of God is both revealed

and concealed within the confines of sacred space, poetic discourse and stylized ritual. Any experience of such an 'expressive' world of Christian redemption has the potential and challenge to communicate both a revelatory 'showing' (thereby instantiating a dynamic of 'presence') while simultaneously offering a 'brilliant darkness' of unknowing absence; in the dialectic tension between these two poles liturgy situates itself and performs its revelatory task of beckoning worshippers towards 'another place' to which they belong.

Since, therefore, God's beauty is *ultimately* non-representative and can never be grasped fully within the confines of the sacred spaces or poetic discourse of ecclesial ritual, the nearest one may get to its meaning and truth is through an experience of the 'expressive' world of Christian redemption. Liturgy has the potential to communicate this expressive dimension. Certainly the use of the efficacious sign in Catholic theology has always been rooted in this idea, as I have indicated earlier. This affirmation, interpenetrated by negation, presence and absence, reflects an apophatic theology which lies at the heart of Catholic sacramentality and liturgy. Liturgical signs and sacramental signs *give expression* to a presence through the signified materiality at hand within liturgical form, but they also signify a divine absence. A 'real presence' is always possible in relation to absence.

Oliver Davies: Aesthetics, Liturgy and Poetics

Davies's writing on the relationship between theology and poetry is also pertinent to my argument about the nature of liturgy. He contends that any reciting of a Christian poem is a dramatic performance in which the actors use both their own voices and the voice of another:

> one of the key factors which poetry and Christian speech have in common, and which grounds their natural affinity, is the fact that neither the speech of poets nor that of apostles can be said to be ordinary speech; both are forms of human talking which are powerfully under the sway of some other power, or licence. (2001: 177)

Both 'have distanced themselves from the conventional speech of human beings, to have undergone some degree of deviation from the norm, to be – in Shklovsky's phrase – speech "made strange"' (Davies 2001: 177). Such speech has the means of creating another sense of time and place. The poem is able to set up a world within its own parameters, a world brought about by the words and entered into by the reader through resonance of sound and metre. As Davies contends, 'the boundaries of the poem serve to create an inner-linguistic space: a world within the poem' (2001: 178). Poetry

> adds something essential to our experience of being alive, namely, the sense of being answerable to and involved in fluid processes of creation and meaning which transcend the parameters of the self and locate us, 'carnavalistically' in Baktin's pregnant phrase, in the broader contexts of world and existence. (2001: 184)

Of the task of the theologian, Davies writes,

Theirs is a speech which is not to be of their own making, but which, radically, is to belong to another. To do theology is therefore in a sense to turn oneself over to another; it is to be dispossessed of self, stripped of one's own meanings. Theologians are summoned to speak in such a way that they themselves become a word spoken in the breath of another. (2001: 168)

At the heart of poetry and religious language is an ambiguous and indeterminate meaning – creativity and revelation are responsible for setting up an excess of meaning which language is expected, and yet not able, to bear. And a task of hermeneutics is called for. The language is re-contextualized in every new culture and sets up a counter-realm to the 'real'. For Wallace Stevens poetry has the capability of touching the 'tap-root' of all experience, by which it releases the imagination and resists the 'pressure of reality', a view I will expand on a little later in my examination of Artaud's work on drama. Davies adds that 'This truth cannot ever be adequately grasped and made our own but – as excess – must rather be visibly *performed* within the world' (2001: 278). And, 'Thus the church in this aspect is itself a field of performance, a bodily acting out of the truth of the revelation, in a kind of theatre of dispossession' (2001: 279). The 'outside' world is confronted with its own mystery and the question posed: what might life be like if we can empathize with the insiders? Challenges are presented which come to be at odds with the empirical world, constituting an effect akin to Brecht's alienation motif which draws us out of our 'normal' existence, which then appears empty (Davies 2001).

But the differences between poetics and religious revelation must not be underplayed. Religious language, unlike poetic language, manifests not only a range of meanings simply at the level of the horizontal but also towards a vanishing depth at the level of the vertical;

the deepest affirmation of the self with respect to the world is that which springs from the creative excess of existence itself, its propensity to become … 'enriched' or 'intensified existence' or being ... This is the capacity of existence always to transcend itself in the embrace of the other, whether as the specific or generalized other. (Davies 2001: 33)

Davies takes the transfiguration account as an event which discloses the real. It is 'good' that the disciples are there since it is 'natural' that human beings have experience of the divine. They are not extraneous to it but belong to it and their response is one of awe and reverence. Their experience is one of *adorans*, bowled over by the disclosure of the truth; it is best understood within a negative theology of unknowing, silence and even confusion on the part of the disciples, combined with a shattering Light. The experience of transfiguration is an apophatic one, since it occasions a turning back into the world of divine disclosure with a new kind of perception and 'seeing' after an experience of light and mystery. The transfiguration reminds us that Christ is not beyond but in the world. We are an integral part of the world, ultimately not alienated from it but made part of it, forever seeking our 'at-home-ness' within it (Davies 2001: 194). And yet, as Davies comments when talking about a more general sense of Christian identity, 'The reception of Christian truth as faith is always trangressive … taking us beyond the boundaries of what we perceive

to be specifically our own possession: and is always dispossessive as we come under the power of another' (2001: 278).

This experience of the real can never be forced into recognition. It comes through a passive attentiveness which discovers what is already there, what possibilities lie open to us; and its most definitive context, for Davies, is the Eucharist. Here in receiving the body and blood of Christ, we receive a new way of being in the world. In this reception of the living Word we are 'called out of our own meanings not through interpretation but by the embrace of the speaking other whose voice, as the spirit's voice, inhabits our own speaking as celebration and intercession' (2001: 145). The real does not come to us as strange through the operations of the sacraments. It is known by the claims it makes upon us, and the self tutored in the Eucharistic Presence – as the formation of a certain kind of embodiment (2001: 146). We receive divine hospitality.

The Dramatic World of Antonin Artaud

This touching of the 'tap-root' of all experience to which I referred to earlier, is very much the concern of Artaud's writing on drama in relation to performative gesture and movement (Harris 1990). He wants the theatre to give expression to what he calls those 'sleeping forces' which exist beneath the surface of everyday reality and which only show themselves in glimpses and then return to their own abodes. The goal of good drama is to dramatize this other archetypal reality which offers life and energy. The 'double' for this playwright is

> the Double not of this direct, everyday reality of which it is gradually being reduced to a mere inert replica – as empty as it is sugar-coated – but of another archetypal and dangerous reality, a reality of which the Principles, like dolphins, once they have shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep. (Artaud 1958 : 48)

This is not unlike Booker's analysis of the seven basic plots in story-telling with his discussion of their archetypal symbolism as a foundation to their meanings (Booker 2004). Artaud's dramatic theory is concerned with getting into touch with a potent reality 'which might determine, disclose, and direct the secret forces of the universe' (1958: 10). And 'It must be said that the domain of the theatre is not psychological but plastic and physical' (1958: 71).

The way to do this is not primarily through language, but through images, allegories, performative gestures and spatial movement, which have the capacity to simultaneously disclose and conceal; their task is to convey the un-conveyable as far as it is possible to do so; beauty is captured in the fleeting moment:

> All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it ... True expression hides what it makes manifest ... All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void ... That is why an image, an allegory, a figure that masks what it would reveal have more significance for the spirit than the lucidities of speech and its analytics. (Artaud 1958: 71)

Beauty is only captured in its fading and loss: As Artaud notes, 'true beauty never strikes us directly. The setting sun is beautiful because of all it makes us lose' (1958: 71).

Artaud wants a kind of 'mystical experiment' to take place on the stage in which all that is 'obscure, hidden, and unrevealed in the mind will be manifested in a kind of material, objective projection' constituting 'an authentic performance of magic' (1958: 119). This is not dissimilar to what Brook describes about the theatre of the invisible made visible in his *The Empty Space*:

> The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear has a deep hold on our thoughts. We are all aware that most of life escapes our senses: a most powerful explanation of the various arts is that they talk of patterns which we can only begin to recognize when they manifest themselves as rhythms or shapes. (Brook 1990: 47)

What this dramatist sets in motion on stage is the manifested, that reality which lies beneath the surface. Although Artaud, of course, envisages a secular model for interpreting such phenomena and nowhere attributes a divine source for such disclosures, his attempt to get into touch with an essential vitality emerging from the beneath the surface, which appears and disappears, offers a helpful analogy to liturgy's expressive and apophatic modes which attempt to disclose that which lies hidden and beyond.

Beauty in the Ineffable

Comparing the attitude of the cinematographer to the task of the Church, Hederman's claim is that Bresson attempted to slow down 'our frantic ransacking of the image for its narrative content and allow us to gaze at the reality itself' (2002: 62). His aim was to focus on the mystery of the film: 'Build your film on white, on silence and stillness' (quoted in Hederman 2002: 62). Bresson comments from the Greek orthodox liturgy, 'Be attentive … one must not seek, one must wait', because the purpose of such films is to 'make visible what, without you, might never have been seen' (quoted in Hederman 2002: 62). The image in a Bresson film acts like an icon, allowing something other than the depiction to shine through. 'Your film's beauty will not be in the images (postcardism) but in the *ineffable* which they will emanate ... each image must be transformed ... with other colours' (quoted in Hederman 2002: 62–63, my italics). The cinematographer has 'to rob each image, to clean it out of its glimmering superficiality, until it gives up its key which will open up the mystery of the next image' (2002: 63). Hederman comments that,

> the layer of gold-leaf which is the basis for many icons is the most fundamental symbol of the presence of God as light ... By such methods icons are means of communication. They radiate an energy of light … The icon has no frame. It is not self-contained. It is open to the infinite on all sides. It is merely a focal point, a prism, concentrating energy and relaying vision to a place beyond itself. (2002: 59)

Training the eye to see more than the immediate surface reality is a matter of education and disciplining ourselves to see what lies hidden beneath the surface is discernment.

Throughout this chapter I have emphasized the expressive power of aesthetics to reveal a disclosure of truth which is analogous to the task liturgists have in their performance of the narrative of salvation. Both, in attempting to give shape or rhythm to a reality or truth which is ultimately inexpressible, inevitably align themselves to an apophatic discourse and practice which gives support and justification to their use of the material. Liturgy, like art, is concerned to reveal something of the mystery and truth of existence which can never finally be revealed, but which offers the possibility of a 'presence' which may be *felt* and as a result, known, if only for a short time, before it is experienced and known again, with fresh insight, through the ongoing re-enactment of the rite. As Cixous notes in her poetic account of the last painting or portrait of God, 'Seen by us, these canvases were "beautiful". Seen by him, they are obstacles on the path to the last one' (2000: 596).

Conclusion

In the course of this book I have argued that the purpose and nature of liturgy might be better illuminated when its mystical, material, symbolic and aesthetic dimensions are taken seriously. I have suggested throughout that one of the central dynamics of worship is to encourage a movement of return towards the ineffable and silent mystery that worship celebrates. Such a process is ongoing and ceaseless since liturgy offers both rest and an encouragement to go on striving for more, an experience of desire and longing, which sets in motion a transformation of the self in Christ, nothing less than a process of deification. It is a movement towards the darkness of the mysterious light of Beauty.

Any such movement involves a journey towards the home where we belong and are most happy, 'another place' which is radically Other to the one we inhabit, but which remains co-extensive with the redeemed world liturgy highlights and sustains. *The boundary between two worlds is the space liturgy inhabits*. 'Another place' is both here and not yet here. The symbolic realism and sacramental signs liturgy uses offer participants a visible and tangible means to experience this place, which is beyond and yet contained within the rite, allowing them to move towards that for which they long. Visible forms express this dynamic rather than simply illustrate revealed truths, thereby allowing a disclosure of meaning and value to erupt in the ritual arena. The signs and symbols which liturgy employ give expression through the Spirit to a 'presence' inexhaustible in its meaning. They become, as Bresson's discussion of film images reminds us, the mode of beauty through which the ineffable emanates.

I argued that the mentality of the Middle Ages, which accepted the symbolic as expressive of mystery, allowed images of the transcendent to disclose themselves in 'dissimilar similitudes'. This, I contended, is still relevant for the twenty-first century, despite obvious counter-arguments that religious symbolism is no longer able to 'speak' to the secular world. In connection with this position, I maintained, crucially, that liturgy releases an experience of the divine which is felt 'in the cave', made real by the power of the Spirit made manifest in the rite. 'Another place' is the space of the rite and also *not* the rite. It is a place of beauty.

I have also shown extensively throughout the book how the apophatic tradition of spirituality offers an illuminating lens through which to recognize this trajectory of liturgy. Any movement towards the mystery of the divine includes an experience of the darkness of divine incomprehensibility and a revelation of its light. Liturgy therefore, always offers as much concealment as it does disclosure, as much absence as presence. There is no definitive 'knowing', no easy grasp of the mystery – every person who claims the opposite is, to quote Gregory of Nyssa, *a liar*. In examining this theme, I also demonstrated how the apophatic mode of knowing operates in relation to its cataphatic relation. The vertical is never separated from the horizontal in worship since mystery and beauty emanate from the substance and materiality of

the rite, its symbolic and sacramental visibility vital in releasing an anagogic ascent to the divine.

My discussion of how liturgical symbolism and images offered layers of affective meaning extended this notion of the cataphatic. Worshippers' affective response, I argued, is always dependent on the mode of delivery liturgy assumes. Any such mode depends on the images, symbols and signs employed, the imaginative and aesthetic means of 'imaging' the One who is the Image of the unseen God. My discussions of this dimension claimed that the 'felt' experience of this invisible world is possible if aesthetic means are used. Once the liturgy is able to communicate such an affective response, then a transformational way of perceiving reality and the self begins to take shape in relation to the world and values liturgy celebrates. Participants begin to feel and respond towards the external world in a manner similar to that occasioned in the liturgy. Worshippers might then claim they are beginning to feel as Christ felt and learning how to respond to the world as He did.

Extending this theme, I outlined how liturgy has much to learn from aesthetic theory. Analogous to works of art, worship is concerned with offering a performance of creative presence and absence in its communication of a 'feeling' for redemption. The mystery of beauty which will save the world is made possible by a creative form of expression not easily explained by reason. Such 'expressions' are able to transcend towards a meaning and the represented able to become, according to Dufrenne, something which surpasses itself towards its true meaning. By such expressive means, an ecstatic journey of self-giving is encouraged, as participants move towards the One they refuse to hold any mastery over, but whom they experience intimately in the depths of the self.

I have also highlighted how the use of imagery has the potential to lead worshippers to the divine. Images of Christ, Mary and the saints remind onlookers that they are made in the image of God and that one day they might too be transfigured like them; they act as contemplative encouragements. Idols, I demonstrated, do the reverse, reflecting back the look of the onlooker, becoming devoid of revelatory import. As I indicated in Chapter 1 when referring to St John of Damascus, legitimate defences of the use of images led onlookers to do homage to the One who is Creator of all. In this regard, images reflected a deeply anagogic purpose. I also showed how the recognition of the sacramental harmony of the world might become a starting point for adoration, a position reflected in Eucharistic Prayer IV of the Roman Rite: 'Source of life and goodness, you have created all things / to fill your creatures with every blessing / and lead all men to the joyful vision of your light'; similarly, the *sanctus* declares, 'Heaven *and* earth are filled with the your glory'. In contrast, I traced in Chapter 3 how Protestant understandings of worship and faith denied this sacramental and 'imaged' vision of the world, ironically undermining their claims to safeguard the mystery of a sovereign God by their insistence on His separateness from the created order. This approach, coupled with their internalized notion of faith demanding self-scrutiny, resulted in a very different understanding of faith and worship to the one envisaged by the early patristic and medieval writers and by many contemporary Roman Catholic and Orthodox understandings.

The neo-Dionysian foundation of liturgy I have recommended throughout was supported by those theologians East and West, who besides giving due emphasis to

liturgy's apophatic mode, highlighted its material, symbolic and aesthetic constituents (Brown 2006) The return to the source of beauty, it was suggested, takes place in liturgy through Christ, who is the way back to the mystery, Himself the mystery of the Word made flesh. All aspects of liturgy, I suggested, should give witness to this silent mystery and encourage songs of praise and adoration to be given to the named One beyond names. I also suggested that if the Dionysian rather than Augustinian influence on Christian worship had lasted longer and been stronger, a different story would have unfolded, one which would have been less tentative about the beauty of the world and more confident about the movement of return, expounded so brilliantly by Denys. The liturgy of the future has more to learn from Denys than St Augustine.

Extending the theme of self-recognition and self-transformation, I emphasized further the doctrine of deification, a process emphasized by Eastern Christianity, largely ignored in the West. I suggested it is impossible to see the self as *homo adorans* unless a process of *memoria* is undertaken, a venture which takes us to the heart of who we are, illuminated by those theologians I examined in Chapter 2 with their emphasis on the interior journey. Once the self is recognized and acknowledged as *imago Dei*, a transformation entailing gratitude and homage may begin to take place. We realize that we are 'in no strange land' (quoted in Ware 1998: 23), since a secret call within us beckons us to remember and realize who we are and the other place to which we belong.

A theology of beauty has dominated my discussions of liturgy throughout. I suggested that the awesome beauty of the One made flesh, the iconic face of beauty, besides releasing a movement of *eros* invites a humbling of the worshipping self often acknowledged in silence and adoration. Beauty brings worshippers to a point of silence by offering them the space and time to know who they are in relation to the One they move towards, an experience of absolute transcendence and life-changing intimacy. Any attempt to re-invigorate the liturgy of the future which ignores an aesthetic rooted in beauty is likely to fail – the God that liturgy praises is the always the God who enraptures worshippers with ineffable attraction and glory.

In summary then, throughout the book, I attempted to elucidate six related themes in relation to the notion of movement and its bearing on self-identity and self-transformation in the hope of offering an approach towards liturgy helpful to the twenty-first century. In Chapter 1 I drew attention to the movement of return with particular reference to the work of Denys. In my extended examination of his writings I suggested that he is best understood primarily as a liturgical theologian and that his work exemplifies how worship might secure an apophatic and anagogical movement towards the divine. This was followed by an examination of how St John of Damascus and the Victorines re-emphasized the importance of the material and symbolic within liturgical contexts during the early and medieval periods. In Chapter 2 I focussed on how four selected theologians emphasized the journey towards self-identity in terms of *imago Dei*, arguing that liturgy offers not only a encounter with a transcendent Other but with the depths of human interiority, while in Chapter 3 I attempted to demonstrate how important images became within medieval liturgy for securing an anagogic movement to the divine. Centred around their felt presence they offered participants 'another place' to be part of in relation to the events of

salvation. I then moved on to consider how some Protestant reformers conceived images in relation to their re-construction of *faith,* which based itself on a radical interiorization, relying on a significantly attenuated sacramental understanding of society. Throughout Chapter 4 I promoted a concern for beauty in liturgy which I suggested released a movement of *eros* towards the divine. Centring my concerns on the theology of St Gregory of Nyssa and contemporary Orthodox theologians, I sought to expound on the importance of the mysterious presence of beauty for any substantial theory and practice of liturgy. I claimed such an understanding rested on a sacramental vision of the world which offered an analogy of being to the ineffable source of beauty. In Chapter 5 I defended those theologians like Maximus the Confessor and Rahner, who articulated the importance of mystery as a central component of worship. Associating their ideas with my earlier examinations of the self in chapter two, I claimed that the process of deification is best understood within the notion of mystery. Finally, in Chapter 6 I outlined an aesthetics of worship in relation to its expressive function to become a revelation of truth and the disclosure of a reality which has bearing on worshippers' self-identity and transformation.

   In all this, my concern has been to articulate the powerful and anagogical context that liturgy offers worshippers as they yearn towards the ineffable source of divine love, that 'brilliant darkness' of which Denys so movingly wrote, an experience which beckons them in a movement of insatiable ascent from 'glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). What I have sought to convey is a twenty-first century story of transfiguration, made uniquely possible within the liturgy of the Church.

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Index